

THE DRACULA HORROR SERIES #1

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Dracula Returns!

by Robert Lory

Professor Harmon's visit
to ancient Transylvania
begins a new expedition
into the bloodthirsty realm
of the world's most fearsome
character!



Henry Braggman

BLOOD ♦ ♦ ♦

“How can we control the fiend subsequent to his liberation from the death state?” Cam asked Professor Harmon.

Harmon showed him a diagram of two implants—one in himself and one in Dracula, both close to the heart. “The one inside me is simple. Operated by a solenoid cell, it emits a wave of energy. The second, in Dracula, is a bit more complicated. Here, you see the receiver which is keyed to the signal from the device within myself.”

“How will you insert the implants?”

“Dracula’s I insert myself—before the stake is pulled out of him. A simple operation which can be accomplished in little time. As to my own, that will take some doing, but I have a surgeon friend who I think will accommodate us.”

“What about blood?”

“Blood?” Harmon repeated the word with raised eyebrows.

“Yes, blood,” Cam said again. “If all we’ve read about this Dracula is correct, he feeds on blood. How were you planning to provide for his needs?”

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by Robert Lory

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DRACULA RETURNS

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“Among the volumes of writing that you no doubt have devoured regarding such as I, there are a great many misconceptions.”

Count Dracula

PROLOGUE: TWO INCIDENTS

"We have him! We have him now!"

The shout that echoed through the still air of the pre-dawn night was one of encouragement and warning. The man who had called out pointed up the craggy hillside. He halted his climb just long enough to be sure that the three others in his party had seen the direction of his stabbing index finger. On the great stone structure capping the highest pinnacle, a lone running figure was now silhouetted against the pale moon.

The shout, in English, sounded foreign in this land, but the other three understood it. All were foreigners themselves; three, including the girl, were British and the fourth a Dutchman. The figure they pursued would have understood the language too, had he heard the Englishman's words, but he did not.

"Only a little way now—then he is ours!" the lead man urged.

"When the sun rises, you mean," the second Englishman corrected.

"Aye, when the sun rises. But it will be up by the time we reach the castle. Hurry now!"

They hurried, the four of them keeping their eyes focused on the fortresslike walls above them as they scrambled upward. The figure they were pursuing soon was lost to their view, but each had seen the limping gait with which he ran. Each knew that it would have to be tonight—or possibly never. The alternative was ghastly, under the circumstances.

The climb was not an easy one, would not have been for a professional athlete. None of the four fell into that classification. Two of the men had had mountain-climbing experience, but that had been with proper equipment and unencumbered by two complete amateurs. At points in their upward struggle, the footholds reduced themselves to inches. At other points, the wall of stone ahead was sheer and behind them there was nothing but empty space. The blackness concealed the sharp and deadly ground below. It would have been a difficult ascent even had the pace been leisurely. But the pace was not leisurely, even though logic told each of them that it could be. There was no need to be overly hasty; they had him now.

He could go nowhere but into the stone fortress that was his home. He would have to be inside the castle—and inside the other thing, too—before the coming dawn light. Yet they hurried, urgently, ignoring logic. After all, he himself was not included in the logic of things, was he?

And after today, he would be included in nothing at all. . . .

The first rays of the rising sun showed themselves in dull orange shafts as the four paused before the high oak doors that barred their entry into the great reception hall

that lay beyond. They had been inside before and knew that the massive doors were fastened by a thick iron bar. They hoped that in his hurry he might not have stopped to fasten it.

But he had. They pushed, but opening the oaken gate would not be accomplished that simply. Their shoulders crashed brutally against its solidness.

"The windows?" the girl suggested.

"Barred, all of them," the Dutchman countered. "It has to be the door. This one. All the others have bars as well."

"It looks rather old," commented the senior of the two Englishmen. "Perhaps a battering ram of some sort—"

The four fanned out, then regrouped again when the younger Englishman called that he'd found something that might do. It was one of a collection of long logs that had been piled in back of the main house outside the kitchen. They selected the heaviest and tried it against the back entrance. It stood fast. They moved around to the front of the structure again to the older door.

"Those hinges look to be rusted," the older Englishman commented. With a grunt he lifted the rear end of the log and joined in the rush toward the oak barrier. The shock of the jar dropped him onto his back.

"Look—we've done it!" the Dutchman cried.

"What luck!" the young Englishman said. "The wood has rotted. Just two or three good hearty thrusts—"

It took a total of six. Then the bottom of the right door caved inward with a crash that reverberated throughout the interior of the house. The sharp jagged gap in the rotten wood was large enough to allow the four intruders entry.

The reception hall was as silent as death.

Reaching now inside his jacket and extracting two strange objects, the Dutchman led the way. Any of the four could have gone first. They all knew where they were headed, where the object of their quest was located. Even had they not known, the dim sunlight revealed a trail of wet spots on the stone floor they trod. It was blood. *Ironic*, mused the Dutchman, *that the fiend would leave a trail of blood.*

Their boot-heels clacked noisily on the stone, echoing through the high-ceilinged rooms as they passed from the reception hall into the old booklined study where each of the men had at one time sipped great snifters of brandy with the master of the castle. Those had been pleasant hours which, if now remembered at all, were recalled with a sense of underlying horror. That they had actually discussed matters artistic and philosophic with this man who—

Man? A fiend was what he was. And *was* would be the appropriate tense, very shortly now.

There was an Indian tapestry at the north end of the study. The Dutchman pulled it to one side, revealing the stone steps that led downward to the wine cellar.

"We will need a light," the Dutchman said.

The younger Englishman borrowed a kerosene lamp from the ornate desk in the center of the study and lighted it. "And there was light," he quoted jovially.

The older countryman jerked his head toward the one who was holding the lamp. He was about to say something about this being no time for facetious remarks, but then thought better of it. It was a front. Under the circumstances, it was understandable, and possibly necessary to preserve the fellow's sanity. God knew, the sanity of all of them would be in jeopardy before this deed was done, but done it must be.

The younger man took the lead now, the lamplight casting black shadows which leapt crazily all around them as they descended the stone stairway. It led them circularly to the right, several feet down, where it met the stone floor of a room. The light of the lamp bounced grotesque forms back at them. Crouching beasts seemed to line the walls. It was as though demons had been awaiting them and, now that they were deep within the foul grotto, would spring at their throats.

Intellectually, the squat shapes were recognized for what they were—wine casks that contained some of the finest yield that Europe could boast. But one could not fully use one's intellect at a juncture such as this. Especially when one knew—or even suspected—what one would find in the place to the other side of the wine cellar.

It was there in the octagonal-shaped alcove—centrally placed, almost perfectly in accord with the room's geometry. Brightly polished wood with ancient-looking gold and silver ornamentation, it reflected the light splendidly, almost as if it had a source of illumination within itself. *A handsome piece of work*, the old Englishman caught himself thinking. Handsome? In craftsmanship, yes, but in everything else *gruesome* was the word.

The girl stayed back in the shadows as the three men approached the closed casket.

The Dutchman, noting the smear of blood on the side of the casket lid, raised the two objects he held high into the air and nodded. Quietly, almost with reverence, the two Englishmen raised the lid and pulled it over so that it remained open.

He lay as if dead inside, surrounded on four sides by the white satin that lined his resting place, but resting in fact, upon the layer of dark, rich earth that carpeted

the floor of the elaborate box. A tear in his left trouser leg betrayed the slash of the young Englishman's sword. He lay as if dead. But he was not dead; that was the job the four foreigners had come to accomplish.

"Now," the older Englishman said softly.

With his left hand, the Dutchman placed the wooden stake over the heart of the one who lay in the casket. He swung back his other arm, back and high—as if he were gathering power from the heavens above—then the arm drove downward powerfully, the mallet in his right hand landing squarely on the top of the stake. There was the deafening sound of wood meeting wood.

A nonhuman scream rent the air.

The human form within the casket half sat up. The face that had been that of a distinguished-looking member of an obscure royalty became for an instant alive. *A handsome face*, thought the girl, though she cringed in the shadows to avoid the stare of its baleful orbs. The eyes stared in disbelief that they would see no more; the eyes joined his lungs in the shock, the scream of injustice. Finally, they closed in death as the form slumped backward onto its earthen bed.

"It is done," the Dutchman said heavily. "There remains nothing more for us to do."

The older Englishman began a nod but halted before it was completed. From one of the eight corners of the room, two slits of light stabbed at him. Suddenly the others saw it, too, and a shift of the lamp revealed what it was. A black cat, a rather large one, sat silently on its haunches, watching them.

The girl shuddered. "Please, can we go now?"

The three men muttered affirmation. The young Englishman led the way back into the wine cellar. It was there an idea he'd considered before recurred to him.

"The wooden stake is supposed to end the trouble. But surely there is something more we can do."

"Namely?" the Dutchman inquired.

"Can we not give him the fires of the hell from which he sprang?"

The Dutchman looked from the Englishman's eyes to the flame of the lamp. "There would be no harm in it. Do as you will, but bring a second light from upstairs. We need yours to find our way out."

It was sound advice and the young Englishman accepted it; he brought two lamps down to the wine cellar with him. However, when he attempted to enter the octagonal room, he found the way blocked. Somehow a stone wall had appeared where there had been no wall before. An accident, no doubt. Probably on their way back upstairs one of them had tripped the device which operated the sliding panel. Surely, *he* could not have . . . and inside there was just that cat which would be incapable of. . .

The young man felt an uncomfortable shiver move up his backbone. He set his fire in the wine cellar.

The month was September. The year was 1883. The nearest village was called Arefu, located in the south-central part of the country now known as Romania.

The year is 1938, the month is July. The place is New York City. More specifically, it is the Lower West Side dock area of Manhattan. It is five minutes after midnight. The man lying prone on the slatted wood dock is twenty-five years old.

He screams as the lead pipe descends upon his back. The pipe comes down a second time. He screams a second time. He tries to lift his arms and legs, but cannot. They are being held to the surface of the docks,

one man to each limb. It is the man holding the left leg that speaks.

"Colly. Let it go. Either kill this punk cop or let one of us do it."

The man called Colly grinned. "Shut your mouth. I'm running this show. I want to give our little professor here a lesson. You hear me, Professor?"

For a third time the pipe came down. For a third time the victim screamed. The man called Colly laughed.

"You know who this fish professor is, you guys? He's a big brain—not just one college degree, but two of them. That means you supposed to call him a doctor. With all that brain stuff he's come out to track down us low-life hoods—right, Professor?"

Colly brought down the pipe a fifth time. Then a sixth time, and a seventh and eighth and. . .

The eleventh time the pipe descended, the victim did not scream. His eyes were closed, his tongue hung loosely from his open mouth. The twelfth time the pipe came down it cracked into the victim's skull.

Colly grinned. "See, Professor—brains ain't everything. Okay, toss him into the drink. Let's see if our fish professor ever learned to swim as good as the real fish. I mean, just like him they all go to school—right?"

As Colly laughed at his own joke, two of his companions threw the battered policeman off the dock and into the cold waters of the Hudson River. Colly still was laughing as he started his Ford and his four men piled inside. It was a night for boozing and wenching, and they were late getting started.

That might explain why none of them bothered to look to make sure the professor stayed under the surface. He didn't. Barely alive, unable to use his legs, still his arms fought the current that was determined to carry him down

and out. His head was pounding savagely and his eyes were filled with blood; he fought with arms and will and finally his hands grasped the bottom of a pier.

He was told he would always wear a metal plate cupped around the frontal lobes of his brain. He was told that he would be confined to a wheelchair for life. He was told that he had disobeyed his police department superior's orders by entering the "field" as he had done. He had been hired as a criminologist on special duty, he was told, and having been found guilty of insubordination he was no longer a member of New York City's Finest. Reminded that his personal financial circumstances were such as to cause him little concern, he was told also that he would have no trouble finding another position, not a man of his education and intellect. They were right, at least, concerning the last part. But there were things this man wanted to do.

And he resolved to do them, whether he was paid by official law enforcement bodies or not.

The 1938 victim bided his time.

So did the victim of 1883.

CHAPTER I

If conditions are right, and the elements of nature conspire one with another in correct proportions, there is perhaps no other place on this planet more unsettling than the cross-hatched canyons of Manhattan at night. London's fog has been known to chill the most stout-hearted resident, and the dark alleys of Paris have their own special effect on the lost stranger. Where the London mood is Gothic, the Paris mood is one of hair-raising intrigue and abandon. But the mood of the island of Manhattan, with its steel, glass, concrete, and pitch-black parks illuminated by occasional lamps and the flashlights of nervous policemen, is something else again. By day the island is a frenzied mesh of humanity that the mind can only comprehend in the abstract. At nightfall, it is a place quite different. It is as if a veil separated the Manhattan worlds of light and dark.

But it is not the dark alone that changes one's mood. Neither does it depend on rain or wind or any other single thing. It is, rather, a combination of things. When

the light of the sun is gone, on certain nights the mists of the Hudson and East rivers rise to envelop the island. The souls who find themselves on the dark streets of this city often find themselves victims of a raw and horrifying touch, that more than hints of the island's roots in savagery.

It was shortly after 10:30 P.M. when the yellow taxi pulled in front of a six-story brownstone in the East Eighties. As he changed the large bill he had been given, the driver, a veteran of the New York City streets, peered out into the hazy night not so much to be sure he had the correct address but rather to assure himself that the sidewalks contained no threat to his woman passenger. In the old days you knew which areas of the city were potentially dangerous and which were harmless. These days no area was free from the junkie-muggers to whom life meant little if it stood in the way of a snatched pocketbook or wallet and the dollars inside that would buy that next essential fix.

His passenger looked to be the kind of mark they would go for, too. An older woman, in her sixties, possibly even her seventies. Not that she looked feeble or anything. Far from it. In the rear-view mirror he had been drawn to her face. She had the quiet dignity and self-assurance of wealth. Her attitude said she had nothing to fear regardless of where she happened to be, or what circumstances she found herself in. Her clothes too—black coat and gloves, and black hat that almost, but not quite, covered the silvery hair pulled up into it—declared quiet well-tailored wealth, even though they seemed a bit heavy for the humid August night. Yes, she was the kind a mugger would think a profitable target.

Yet there was something strange about the woman. A mugger might be wrong. There was a look about the eyes,

eerie and faintly malevolent. Old eyes, true; in fact they looked older than the hills. Yet strangely colored, almost a pale green. The driver had watched her from the rear-view mirror, and he had not seen those eyes blink once. Sure, he hadn't been able to keep his eyes on hers all the time—Manhattan traffic could never be that serene—but during the last few minutes of the trip he had tried. All he saw was the vacant, fixed stare of those pale eyes. It was as if they were looking at something far away, perhaps a memory of her long-past youth.

The driver chuckled to himself. All these years at the wheel and it makes a philosopher of you.

"Your change, ma'am."

The woman had been looking at the front steps of the house before them. His voice seemed to startle her back into the present. She seemed for a moment not to know where she was, then her lips formed a satisfied smile. She spoke, and her voice sounded slightly foreign, just as it had when she had given him the address. In New York at least a fourth of his fares sounded foreign, but this voice was different from them. It was as if she was not used to speaking just English, but any language. A stupid thought. The cabbie shrugged it off.

"Thank you, young man. Please keep the excess dollars. It was nice of you to be concerned for my safety."

The driver was a block away before he wondered how she knew he was concerned. *Sure*, he laughed to himself, *your face*—it's as secretive as an open book. *Young man!* He shrugged again and headed south. The mist was rolling in, churning like thick swirls of pea soup.

The woman in black stood before the stone steps leading upward to the door. Her eyes brightened as they fo-

cused upward to the topmost floor of the brownstone. She stood rigid for a moment, as if listening for something; she nodded slightly and climbed the steps. Her movements were creaky. They seemed to take an inordinate amount of effort, but were nonetheless graceful in a strange, animal way. At the top of the steps, she pressed the single button to the right of the tall thick wooden door. A few seconds passed, then she pressed it again. There was the click of a lock turning and the door swung open.

The man with his hand on the inside doorknob was in his early thirties. He was a giant, and his hand, in the same scale, completely engulfed the door knob. Six-foot five-inches in height, he must have weighed more than two-hundred and twenty pounds. Even in the loose-fitting sweatshirt and cotton trousers he wore, it was obvious that all of his body consisted of steellike muscle. The light from behind silhouetted his form and made it even more menacing. The man had dark-brown, Spanish-looking eyes, and no hair on any part of his bullet-shaped head. His voice was deep, but decorously soft and polite.

"Yes?"

"Professor Damien Harmon. I must see him. He can help me."

The man nodded. "Perhaps, but the professor is busy this evening and does not wish to be disturbed. Unless, of course, he's expecting you—did you telephone him for an appointment?"

A smile crossed the woman's face. "I was not aware Professor Harmon had a telephone in the house."

It was the man's turn to smile. "He doesn't. I suggest you leave your card or a number at which you may be reached. Tomorrow, perhaps, he will call you. Although I can't promise anything. His time is extremely valuable."

"And mine," the woman said dully, "mine is extremely short. Might I see him tonight? I shall not take long with my business."

"I wish I could help you, but he left strict orders with me. Besides, the house elevator is broken; I doubt if you could make the stairs to the sixth floor. And the professor—well, he is confined to his—"

"Wheelchair, yes. I know of his disability. As regards myself, I am sure you are right about the stairs." She turned.

"Ma'am—your card. Or a number?"

"Thank you, but I have no card. I find little need for one. And I, like your professor, have no telephone, finding little need for that as well. I will come back another time."

She began to descend the steps, but seemed to stagger, as if her knee joints for a moment could not support the weight above them.

"Lady, are you all right?" the young man asked.

Gripping the stone assist, she looked back toward the door, then straightened herself. "I shall be fine. Please do not bother yourself about me."

The door closed, the click audible in the thick quiet night. The woman's eyes were dull as she stood looking upward at the sixth floor of the building. *Time. Yes, it is very short. Perhaps I waited too long, but I had to be sure. Even now, even this late in time, I am not absolutely certain, but there is too little of the cycle left to investigate elsewhere. It must be now, it must be here.*

She lowered her eyes to the door again. Her eyes burned with a bright green fire.

Cameron Sanchez returned to the parlor and settled back into the leather recliner-chair that was his favorite

reading place in the old brownstone. He located his page in the book he had been studying, a slim volume on radiophonics that he had taken from the professor's library earlier in the evening. In the three years he had been with Damien Harmon he had been through about a fifth of the old man's books. Most of them he had just sampled. An entire half of the library—that dealing with matters occult and philosophical, Cameron Sanchez had little use for. Why waste time pondering the imponderables? They must be a waste of time if they were still being pondered? He knew why Professor Harmon spent so much time with those volumes and knew also that he was absorbed in trying to put into practice the things he read in them. Cameron Sanchez was much more interested in the practical aspects of life. He was curious about the books that used to be the professor's stock and trade: the tomes and journals that dealt with physics and electronics. Many of these dealt with philosophy, too, but this type of philosophy had more practical application. These were the books he would stick with until the day that the professor successfully demonstrated one of those spells that conjured up a spirit from whatever depth was his usual residence. If the demon could create a solid-state transmitter, maybe then Cameron would take the professor's studies seriously. Cameron was single-minded.

Cameron Sanchez never had attended college, but if he had had a mind to, he could have held his own in any electronics laboratory in the United States whether academic, industrial, or government. He grinned to himself. Pretty good for a slum-raised Puerto Rican who, three years ago, had gotten the boot from the New York City police department!

The grin tightened into a scowl. He still could not remember the humiliation without a flash of hatred—not so

much toward the officials who had drummed him out, but toward the system. He had not played ball with the drug pushers of Spanish Harlem, had not taken his juicemoney, had instead toughened things up for the needle-and-pouch men working the area. It was a daring thing for a rookie patrolman to do but Cameron Sanchez had not seen it that way. He was striking out against the tendrils of evil that had gripped his boyhood neighborhood and was strangling from it all decency and respect.

That it was a frame-up no one of responsibility on the force doubted. But the mayor's special commission required hard evidence to counter what the mob had planted. The packet of heroin had been found in his patrol car, after a "tip" that Patrolman Sanchez was taking his graft in the form of white stuff rather than green. The street price of the powder was more than two thousand bucks, in itself a testament to the fact that they were eager to do in this rookie patrolman.

They did him in, all right. Within two weeks, he received permanent suspension. It would have been more than that. It would have been imprisonment, if a hawk-faced old man in a wheelchair had not suddenly entered the fray. It was *his* lawyers that had gotten the Puerto Rican ex-cop off the hook.

"Why?" he had asked the old man. "Why did you concern yourself with me?"

The professor had run a hand through his full mane of white hair and responded matter-of-factly. "I've been looking for a particular kind of man to work for me. I have made my mind up that you're it, and you couldn't very well do the job from a prison cell."

Cameron Sanchez had taken the job with little information about what he would be doing. He had enjoyed the work from the first, in spite of the old man's eccentrici-

ties. No, he couldn't even fault them. After all, were it not for the man's wide range of intellectual pursuits, Cameron Sanchez would not have half the education he now found himself with. Speaking of which, back to the book on radiophonics.

The doorbell rang again.

Cursing under his breath, Cameron Sanchez carefully marked his place in his book and unfolded himself from the recliner. No doubt it was that woman again. He knew the type. Except for the expensive clothes and the strange eyes, she seemed just another in a long line of old babes who, aware that the big brownstone was occupied by just one man and his employee, figured the place to be a good touch for favorite charities. Collecting funds for dog hospitals or for a Keep the Dogs Off Our Streets campaign. Or for diseases nobody ever heard of or politicians nobody wanted to hear about.

Again the bell. Persistence. The pattern was one he'd seen before. His size intimidated them at first try. Then after a little thought—probably about how much they could get if they tried a second time—they screwed up their courage for a second assault.

Okay, lady, this time you get the full No-Solicitors treatment. But—

When Cameron Sanchez yanked opened the front door, the scowl on his face changed to a mystified expression. There was no one there. Nothing except a black cat, slightly larger than the normal breed of alley cat. *Cats don't ring doorbells*, he reflected. Then he had to add to his reflection the observation that cats *do* enter open doorways. It raced like a bullet toward the stairs at the end of the hall.

"*Damn!*" he spat out, beginning the chase.

CHAPTER 2

. . . then there is a point, a conjunction of the dimensions, at which control may be exerted. Peripheral coloration reduces itself into voidness. The reds, blues and yellows take on more and more of their complementaries until the outskirts of the circle take on the cast of a median mud which then grows inward. As it does so, the edges blacken into the awaited voidness. Allowing it to expand toward the center at its own pace—always its own pace—the practitioner must now concentrate his full mental powers on the center and its pure whiteness which grows brighter as instant passes instant. At its greatest intensity, the mind, utilizing this energy source, now can practice the art of remote control. . . .

Now.

His fingers pressing his white-haired temples, Damien Harmon concentrated the white power source that had formed in the front of his brain to a point and aimed it slightly to the right of the cigar lighter on the laboratory table before him. He could not “see” the lighter, since

his eyes were tightly closed, but he nonetheless did “see” the lighter, knew-felt-saw-heard exactly where it was in front of him, exactly where it was in relation to the white beam he sent out toward its right, a beam that was not hot, not cold, but clear and bright and powerful. Pure, raw energy that passed through bone and metal and skin and the air intervening, outward. *Touch!*

Touch and sweep.

Sweep and lift.

Lift and carry.

Carry and—

Damien Harmon opened his eyes at the thud the lighter made as it descended to the tabletop. He had lost control of the thing, but he was not displeased. Not at all. He had lifted and carried the lighter—not merely pushed it as in previous experiments—more than three feet. It was something of a record, not only in distance and weight—previously he had used dice and wooden pencils—but in terms of time as well, time not of the actual movement but of his ability to marshal the internal-energy force. He now could snap it into action much faster than it took to remember the words from the medieval *grimoire* he had translated from the Latin. Soon now he’d be ready for the real test of his abilities. Soon!

“Unfortunately, Professor, that experiment will fail.”

Harmon spun about in his wheelchair. There, across the room in the soft Queen Anne wingback chair that his assistant used when reading here, sat a young woman who he could see, even in the dull light cast by the single bulb of the goose-neck lamp on the table before him, was a lovely creature. Only her face was exposed above the black coat and under the black hat, and that was surrounded by black hair pulled up into the hat. A lovely face with finely chiseled features and bright eyes—

Eyes which flashed an odd combination of green and yellow as they took note of his hand moving to the wheel rims of his chair.

"No, Professor Harmon. Please remain where you are. Your view of me is exactly as I would have it. To answer the first question in your mind, how I got here is unimportant. I cannot stay long and I do not wish to waste precious time in unnecessary explanation. I will, however, expand on my first words to you. You will never achieve what you are looking for—you will never use your telepathic powers to heal the problem of your lower spine. You may find that this talent may be put to a different—and also rewarding—task. But more about that later. In response to your next question, yes, I have the ability to read thoughts—although the metallic plate before your brain makes your mind waves almost impossible to translate. In any event, any person skilled in human psychology could have interpreted your thoughts just now."

Harmon did not react to her words other than to grasp the handles of his chair and use the power of his bull-like shoulders to straighten his upper half against the backrest. The lower half came with it, this being the only way he could move any part of his body from the waist down, pushing or pulling it with another part. He said nothing, waiting for her to continue. She did in a voice which—*purred* was the word Harmon thought of later.

"I fully recognize that your attempts to heal yourself are not totally self-serving. I know of your work and what you hope to achieve from it. The fighting of what you call evil is a laudable endeavor, but you shall not have the full use of your body to enlist. That is what I can offer you—the potential use of another body."

Harmon smiled. "I have that now." *Speaking of whom, how did she get by him?*

The woman smiled back. "I am not speaking of your man Sanchez. Not belittling the strength of his body, which is admittedly great, there is another body of much greater power that you can utilize."

"If," the professor said wryly.

"Yes, if. *If* you have the courage and a strong enough will."

Harmon nodded. "Suppose you answer that question for me. Do I meet the requirements?"

"I hope so, Professor Harmon." She said quietly, almost in a whisper.

"I suppose I share your hope. I suppose also that you will tell me just who it is who has this great power?"

"He is my Master. His life has been long, or I should say that his *lives* have been long. He has lived many times, you see, and many times he has been as dead."

"*As* dead."

"As dead. But not so, not totally. He is, as I said, my Master. While he lives, so do I—and for a time afterward. For me the end of that time draws near. Each time he has left the land of the living, I have found someone who has brought him back. At all times, in all ages, there have been believers I could use for my purpose."

Again Harmon nodded. "And this time I have been selected?"

"I have chosen you to begin the next cycle. It is an honor not without its dangers, of course, but one which I hope you will accept. If you do not . . . if you do not, I meet my final end from which there is no rebirth."

The professor noted the manner in which the young woman's eyes dropped.

"You claim to be aged, yet you do not appear so, not to me, at least."

"You see me now as I prefer to be seen. Displaying

this youth costs me even more of my allotted span, and I cannot hold to it for long periods."

He changed the subject to one which was of more immediate importance.

"All right. I suppose I am most interested in why. Why me, I mean?"

The yellow-green eyes lifted and burned into his.

"I know of your background, and I know that you would be interested. I also was fairly certain that you would not scoff at the idea, at the possibilities I have presented. Most important, you have a desire which can be fulfilled, just as I do, by the rebirth of the Master."

"There is one basic question," Harmon said. "The obvious one."

"Why I do not bring him back myself? There are certain restrictions, of which you will be apprised later."

He tugged for a moment at his short white beard, a habit he had when considering. "You say you know of my background."

A sigh, like that of exasperation. "I have little time, Professor, so I will be brief. You were born wealthy and brilliant, achieving doctorate degrees in ancient literature and medieval philosophy and a master's degree in physics in your early twenties, also studying in varying intensities subjects ranging from biochemistry and psycho-sociology to archaeology and lost languages. At age twenty-five you took on the job of special assistant to the commissioner of the New York City police; your special field was the new science of criminology. However, in July of 1938 you disobeyed—"

Harmon raised a hand. "That is quite enough."

"I wish to be thorough, Professor Harmon. After your dismissal from the police force, you returned to the academic life. Until you retired at age fifty you taught a

range of subjects in the sciences and the humanities at several universities. You also devoted yourself to two avocations, which, since retirement, have become your main concerns. One is the area of study commonly referred to as the occult. The second is the area of crime, which you do not simply study, but—”

“I said you’ve told me enough.”

The woman smiled. “You mean you do not wish me to tell you—for an example of my skill only—where Colly Rourke lies buried? He—not to mention many others against whom you bore no personal grudge—was murdered, Professor Harmon. At least, that is what the authorities might conclude. If they were aware of the facts, that is. Let me see, now, before you employed Sanchez there was this ex-circus strongman—a Greek, I believe.”

“Sanchez has killed no one at my request.”

“No? Perhaps not at your *specific* request. But that is only because you work differently now. A function of your age, I believe. Violence has a bitter taste, does it? Or is it not that—but instead that you enjoy doing the spadework and then tipping the police off anonymously? The police—which both you and your man have no cause to love. You enjoy embarrassing them, don’t you?”

Harmon’s eyes narrowed. “You said you had little time.”

She rose from the wingbacked chair. “That is correct. I must go. I have offered you much. I hope—for my own sake—that your decision is to take the risk of success.”

As she moved to the door to the hall, the professor called to her. “But you’ve told me nothing about who or where—”

“His original name I do not speak. He has had several, one of which you are more than familiar with. You

have in fact some old writings about him—and me. Hurry, old man. Hurry in your decision and in your travels. I—I must go!”

The panic in her voice was unmistakable as she fled through the open doorway. Harmon called to her to wait, but with no response, and when he had wheeled himself through to the hall he found it quite empty. The stairwell door was open, however.

Quickly he wheeled himself back into the booklined study and to the desk on its far wall. He jabbed down a button on the square black box that sat on the right rear of the desktop. Once, twice, three times. A click sounded from the top of the box.

“Professor?”

“Cam—the woman,” Harmon said into the intercom. “Don’t let her get away!”

“Woman, sir?”

“Surely you saw her come in! Never mind, she’s on her way down now. Stop her!”

Cam clicked off and the professor sat back in his chair. His mind began to churn with dark images, but he shut them out. No, he would not let his imagination work on this, not yet. She had told him she would answer his questions. Later, she had said. She had even said that he might find a use for his telekinesis skill. She had said that—

Never mind what she had said. Cam would bring her to him, then she would deliver as promised.

The intercom buzzed. It was Cam from downstairs.

“Sorry, Professor, no woman.”

Harmon repeated Cam’s last two words.

“I checked all the way up, then went back down. No woman of any size or description. Just the cat.”

“Cat?”

“Big black thing. It sneaked in earlier. I had thought

at first that it had gone up the stairwell, but all the doors off the well were closed—and no cat. Then I looked down around the first floor. I found it just after you called me, coming down the stairs. I can't see how I missed it."

"Cam—the cat. Do you have it?"

"Have it? I threw it out in the street where it belongs. Sir—what was *that*?"

Cam was referring to what, to him, was a horrendous noise coming over the intercom, a crack-splinter-crash of tremendous volume.

"Sir?"

The professor looked behind him, then spoke into the black box. "Cam, I think you'd better come upstairs. Right now."

"Are you all right, sir?"

"I'm fine. But the bookcase—the shelves you anchored so carefully, the ones you assured me would hold a ton of books if necessary—just fell down. Very curious, too."

"Curious?"

"Indeed, Cameron. Only the middle two sections, those which held a particular series of volumes, pulled free. Several of those appear to lie open. What's curious is that the way they lie open is not the way one might predict—not if one analyzed the problem in terms of physical trajectories acted upon by the laws of gravity."

Cam's laugh came through the speaker.

"Are you saying there are non-physical laws governing trajectories, sir?"

"We shall have to discuss that, Cameron. Please be quick about getting yourself up here. Before we discuss anything, we've got some reading to do. Very serious reading."

CHAPTER 3

From the private journal of Pedro de Alvarado, being his remembrances of his years of service under Hernando Cortez, conqueror of Mexico for the Spanish throne:

It is with two minds that I begin to set down the events of that November night which preceded the uprising of the Aztec warriors and which would have signaled the end of our mission in bloody defeat had it not been for the timely return of General Cortez and his army. Because the battle which followed brought death to Moctezuma and his people to their knees, in the joys of triumph no more than a passing inquiry was made into the prior matter, leaving to speculation by the next generation as to how it came to pass that these savages rose up suddenly against us who had been deemed as gods. Perhaps these events and their memory should pass into oblivion with the memories of those who were there to bear witness, and that is a view I hold with one mind. Yet a second mind insists that these things that happened almost forty years ago, and yet still haunt my dreams at night

so that the blessed peace of quiet sleep is but a rare luxury to me, must be preserved in some way. In that many who were witness to the events died in the aftermath and most of the others also are now passed on to God's reward, including Fra Pamphilo himself, the task, if it is to be done at all, is mine to do, even though it be an unwelcome one.

It was a night like many that had preceded it, being set aside for one of the barbarian ceremonies the Indians performed to propitiate one or more of their evil gods. Yet there was a difference. Although in the past, several of our highest ranking officers had been invited to attend these affairs (which invitations, after we had seen one or two of the events, we graciously declined, they being composed of frenzied bacchanals of ritualistic bloodletting in which the live hearts of men and women, who for the most part were captive slaves to the Aztec, were torn savagely from their breasts), it was noted that no one of us was invited to this particular night's event. The affair itself, also, was different from others in that the preparations were carried out by the Indians in a manner more grim than normal. Where as previously all three of the great causeways which connected the island capital of Tenochtitlan from the surrounding mainland were lighted brightly by torch to welcome the worshiped spirits from their dwelling places across the great lake, this night we saw that only the one causeway to the west, that leading from the stone tombs of Tlacopan, was lighted, and this not blazingly but with a very few torches spaced widely apart. It was also apparent after a time that whatever devil was being honored this night was far from welcome in the city itself. Not only were the sliding sections of all three causeways removed, forming a veritable moat

around the island, but the tall gates into the city were closed and barricaded.

Fra Pamphilo and myself had watched these preparations with, I had thought, little in the way of curiosity, enjoying our cups of wine on the western fringe of our encampment. The Holy Father, old even then, was always an excellent drinking companion with much to say from his knowledge of the ways of these savages, he having taken the pains to learn to converse with them in their tongue. To this day I marvel at his mastery of their customs and have often wondered why it was not him who would have set to writing the marvels he knew, only half of which he disclosed in private conversation. But perhaps he did and I am not aware of it. If so, I am certain that his account would be much more erudite than my own in that it was the Holy Father who knew from the beginning what kind of ceremony we would be seeing that night.

He said to me, "Watch there on the lighted causeway. They will take the women out in a boat. There will be two of them which they will bind to a special post. With a golden hammer shall they summon their destroyer."

"You have seen this before?" I asked him.

He told me he had not, but that he had heard much about this strange ritual which was performed at each full moon. The destroyer himself collected his offering, it was said, coming from the tombs to gather his live sacrifices, a requirement he levied just once a month, he being other times satisfied with the hearts and bodies of the slaves killed for him at the central high altar and delivered to the tomb entrances from which they always disappeared. To my suggestion that the priests no doubt were responsible for this disappearance, Fra Pamphilo hesitated to give his opinion. This demon which is called the Son of the Winged Serpent actually appears on the causeway this one night

a month, he said, adding: "It is the only time he is seen. It is true that a priest could be acting the role, but the fear on the faces of the priests I have talked with is not feigned. This night I intend to see the destroyer with my own eyes, my friend. I would welcome your company and your assistance."

I, fool that I was, agreed to help him in his plan.

We waited until the Indians' boat was put into the water and was paddling out toward the mainland. The boat kept close to the southern side of the western causeway, and as it drew near to the place Fra Pamphilo said was where the girls were to be tied, we put our boat into the water, taking care that we were not observed from the gates. It, like the other, was an Indian craft, but we maneuvered it outward on the northern side of the causeway and kept it far from the light of the torches thereupon. As we silently glided out upon the calm water, I was thankful that we had devoted many of our free hours learning the art of using the wooden paddles soundlessly from our savage hosts.

We stilled our boat at a spot adjacent to, but maintaining proper distance from, the place where the two girls were being lashed to the post by heavy ropes which were tied about their locked wrists. From the darkness that enshrouded us, we had an excellent view of the scene, as a torch had been left upright by the priests who soon were silently paddling their craft back toward the city. As savage women go, the two were very pretty and wore no cloth upon their person, their flesh wearing only bright red painted stripes which, beginning with a circle about the neck, coiled downward across breast and stomach and around to their posteriors. The two of them appeared mightily afraid, as they no doubt had every right to be.

On the causeway next to where they were tied the priests had left a large carved gong which was suspended

from a chain which in turn hung from a single upright armature, the bottom part of which splayed out and acted as a stand. All parts of this structure including the gong itself were fashioned from gold and shimmered in the torch-light. Gold also was the implement held by one of the girls—a hammer carved into the shape of a feathered serpent.

They must call the god by means of the gong, Fra Pamphilo explained softly to me. He added that should they not do so without inappropriate hesitation, they would be killed in a highly dishonorable fashion. Their entire families, too, would be slaughtered. I was about to comment that to force them to bring their own destruction upon themselves seemed utterly inhuman, when my companion lay a hand on my forearm to stay my speech. The girl with the golden hammer swung it forcefully with a choked cry.

The golden gong issued forth with a pleasing trumpet sound that nonetheless, as it waved across the water to reach our ears, caused a sudden cold feeling in the small part of my back. It was almost instantly thereafter that, on the mainland side of the causeway, from the black shadows came something blacker still.

It is but a man, of larger stature than most, but surely one of the priests, I whispered to Fra Pamphilo as the figure, passing one of the torches, I now saw to be wearing a great black cloak which covered his facial features. My companion, however, seemed to ignore my observation. So keen in fact was he to miss nothing with his piercing eyes that I thought for a moment he might have turned to stone. It was only when the figure in the cloak had reached the girls and grasped the first one that the Holy Father spoke, and that was to begin a solemn prayer to the Almighty.

I saw the devil's face only briefly at this time, when the cloak fell from his head as he brought the first of the naked girls to him, as he wrenched her upward. Then his face was gone from view, buried as it was into the poor child's throat.

She had screamed at the sight of him; so had the second who screamed still as he savagely attacked the first victim. Attempting futilely to tear her bonds free from their lacings, her pleas to Heaven became more frantic still when he dropped her fellow victim to the causeway and turned toward her. That was when I received a better glance of his features and knew that this was no priest. It was a veritable fiend from the deepest depths of Hell itself.

I shall not try to describe in this place the blood-dripping fangs that issued from his mouth nor the unholy eyes that burned across the water toward us. I shall merely say that Satan himself could instill no further measure of cold fear into my tissue and bones. At first I did not realize that our boat had suddenly become the object of his eyes, but when I did I wondered why this should be so. I looked to my companion and saw that he was trembling mightily but there was a look of determination on his face as he whispered words in some tongue that was not our own nor that of the Church nor that of the savages of this land. It was a strange language, the like of which I had never heard. The thought came to me that it must be that secret language with which the Holy Church exorcises the Devil's minions, and this thought was reinforced by the way in which Fra Pamphilo clutched before him with both hands the little silver crucifix that he customarily wore inside the folds of his vestments.

Wonder of wonders! In a deep guttural tone a response came from the black figure on the causeway. Holding his arm in a position over his face as if to ward off some

sword blow, he howled as if in rage. Then, with an unmerciful pull upward, he tore free the second girl's bonds from the stake to which they had been affixed. Swooning into his ready arms, she was oblivious to his rage which continued to be hurled in our direction. And as Fra Pamphilo put increased force behind the strange words he uttered, the fiend on the causeway roared once more, then with the second girl in his clutches he moved with inhuman speed to the mainland shore. As he disappeared into the black shadows, my companion halted his speech and for a moment his jaw slumped into his chest. When I inquired as to his state of mind and body, he insisted we paddle to the causeway. We must examine the girl who had been attacked first, he said. I, with a bravery I did not feel, mentioned that perhaps we should see to the second and not the first, but he waved the thought aside. She was beyond assistance, he assured me. So, in all probability, was the first girl, he said, but there was something about which he had to assure himself.

We paddled to the spot where she lay, now not bothering with whatever noise we were making. Sounds also now came from the city itself as we came into the vicinity of the causeway and thus into the illumination of the flickering torches. Startled shouts and the opening of creaking gates and the splashing entry of vessels into the lake were the sounds now issuing from the city-island behind us, but our senses were not attuned to these sounds as we scrambled onto the surface of the causeway.

Fra Pamphilo examined the dead girl carefully, but paid especial attention to her throat. For my part, I was completely appalled by what had been a brutal slaying and by the unholy pallor of the young child's face. This is unearthly, I said to my companion. He in turn only nodded his agreement. Leaving off his inspection, he asked

me the time until dawn. Several hours remained before the rising of the sun, and I told him this. Quietly he said that there was no more to be accomplished this night, but that slightly before the coming of the sun we must make ready a small but hardy force. We must destroy the beast, he said flatly, and added that we could not do so before the coming of the sun.

So it was that when the first rays of the morning sun sent their shafts of eerie light over the eastern hills, we again set out from our encampment across the lake. There were but twelve of us in two long boats including the Reverend Father, myself and ten junior officers, each of whom carried charged muskets. Fra Pamphilo had warned us that these were not to be used upon the monster we hunted, but were to be used as deterrents in the event that the Indians would attempt by force to dissuade us from our mission. Although I could not appear so before my officers, I was not at all sure what that mission consisted of. To destroy the beast, of course, Fra Pamphilo said impatiently. Yet when I inquired as to the means of destruction, he displayed only a roughly carved piece of wood of the thickness of a man's forearm. It had been sharpened to a fine tapered point, but even so this did not seem to me to be a very efficient implement of death when we had modern musketry at our disposal.

As we had predicted, the Indians were not favorably disposed to see us cross the water to the western land. During the previous night, after we had returned from the causeway, we had received a delegation of three chief ministers from the lofty Moctezuma. Mainly they spoke with the Reverend Father and although their voices were firm it was not difficult to see the fright within their eyes. When they had gone from our camp, Fra Pamphilo explained to me that they considered our actions dangerous

not only to ourselves but to the entire Aztec people as well, and that in the future we should no more meddle in their dealings with their gods. Moreover, they had said they would keep close watch upon us to see that we did not.

That they did so was evident as our two boats put into the water. A raised cry from the walls brought additional shouts of alarm as we, now having been seen, put all conceivable energy into our paddles, with the result that we reached the opposite shore before our Indian pursuers were halfway across the causeway. There were but a score of them, fewer than half of which were warriors; the other half who led the pack wore the priestly robes which now in their wearers' bandy-legged haste fluttered and flayed in a most undignified manner. At the Reverend Father's suggestion, I commanded all but two of the officers with us to remain at the western end of the causeway and to allow none of our pursuers to pass. Priest and warrior alike had always shown great respect for our weaponry, and I rested certain that such would now be the case as well. Fra Pamphilo himself was not as certain as I. "However," he said solemnly, "what will be will be; come what may as a result of our actions, the evil monster must this day be sent back to his demonic masters in Hell."

As we four approached the tomb-structures of Tlacopan, I suggested that we should be watchful for warrior-guards. This brought a sardonic laugh from my priestly companion. No need to bother, he said. No Indian would come near this place during the night of the full moon.

We did not have to search long for the particular sepulcher we sought. On the steps before it was the young girl the fiend had taken with him the previous night. Of the same pallid cast as her sister victim, her throat was torn open mightily as if by the claws of a falcon, but to

my amazement there seemed to have been very little blood which had issued from the wound. Voicing this observation, I was told by Fra Pamphilo that, on the contrary, very much blood had come from that wound. But he did not explain further, not at this time in which he was zealously eager to enter the great stone tomb.

As we did so, passing through the open archway, I was taken by a dark dread similar to that I experienced in the black hours of the night before. As a man of action who had seen much battle in the service of the Throne, I could not explain this feeling of apprehension; I but knew it was there, deep within me. And yet, as always, knowing that the Spirit of the Church was with us in the holy person of the Reverend Father gave me the measure of internal comfort needed to push myself onward. For the Spirit of the Church is mighty, as was evidenced shortly upon our entering the sepulcher.

A sudden strident cry met our ears and there, on the stone floor, facing us in a crouch which suggested that it was about to spring at our throats, was a large cat with a coat as black as pitch and eyes which glowed with a ghastly shade of yellow-green. It stood in our path but for a moment, however, backing off with a terrible howl as Fra Pamphilo thrust his silver crucifix at its fangs. We did not see the foul animal again, such was the power of the Holy Symbol of Our God. Within moments, however, we cast our eyes upon the visage of that fiend we had come to destroy.

Shall I describe what it was we saw? God in his Heaven knows I surely could do so, as it is this face which stared up from its place in the great stone uncovered sarcophagus which through these intervening two-score years has brought its foul-smelling chill to my nightly dream wanderings and caused me to wake feverish in a pool of icy

sweat. Surely I could attempt to describe this being, yet I hesitate for fear that in doing so I would pass on to whomever reads these words the mental malady that plagues him who writes them. Yet, how can I set down this account without making it full in at least these details? In my heart I know I cannot, thus I can but attempt to describe in objective detachment that which we saw without saying overmuch of the effect it had upon us who saw it.

He lay upon his back, asleep as if dead, arms at his sides. The full length of him was longer than that of either Indian or European, perhaps one half-length longer. His body, completely wrapped in the black cape he had worn the night previous, was broad, his shoulders and chest greater than that of two men. This in itself was unnatural enough, but it was the *face* of him which commanded our attention.

It was not a human face, although it had all of the components of a human countenance; it was perhaps the gross exaggeration of the parts which made the whole something other than of the realm of mankind. The mouth, open with lips drawn back, looked as if no force could completely close it over those finger-length fangs which, shooting upward from the lower jaw and downward from the upper mouth, were without doubt as effective as those utilized by the most fierce beasts of the forest who rip and tear their prey before consuming their flesh. The nose was thick and upturned, with great nostrils that flared upward and outward. The eyes, open and vacantly staring upward toward the dark ceiling of the tomb, were of black and purple centers and their bulbous white surroundings were crosshatched with lightning-like streaks of pink and red. The ears, beginning lower on the jaw than is normal among men and which reached higher onto the sides of the

head, had pointed endings that grew into the mass of long black hair that surrounded the broad forehead and converged in the center of the two wings of hair that were the creature's eyebrows. Startling in themselves, these facial features were made even more so by the dried blood that covered them, staining to a dark red the open lips and teeth, and matting the tangled hair of brows and head.

Fra Pamphilo instructed me thus. We would have to work with decisiveness and speed. He would hold the sharpened wood over the fiend's heart while I with a musket stock would strike the blow that would send the stake home. The initial blow must be one of all my power and this must be repeated until he told me that I might relax in my effort. After the beast had been taken care of, I must then order my men to destroy the body by fire, first taking extreme care to take the soil from the bottom of the casket and, gathering all of it, to bring it to him for scattering into the lake.

As he spoke I noticed this soil for the first time. It was of a dark moist cast, very unlike that of the surrounding countryside. I commented on this to the Reverend Father, and he said that my observation was sound, that in all probability this soil came from a place far away, perhaps from a world other than our own. He then said that we must hesitate no longer, that we must strike the blow and rid the earth of this foul being.

Thus it was that he placed the wooden stake into position and I with trembling hands held high the musket by the barrel and, praying for the necessary strength, brought down the stock square upon the end of the stake. From the resultant impact there came a cracking sound as if the stake which plunged deep into the creature had first broken through a shell. Then to our astonished eyes there came the most horrible sight of all.

The creature sat up in his casket, his great hands grasping the stake which had been pounded into him, his mouth emitting a foul mixture of saliva and blood along with an ungodly scream that I thought would drive me to deafness. His eyes bulged as if they would pop from his skull, then his entire body lurched upward in a mighty spasm, following which it crashed back upon the earth in the casket.

Fra Pamphilo said, "The fiend is dead. Now must you have my other instructions carried out. But first, look upon the face of him."

As I did so I noted a change taking place, as if the countenance of the fiend were melting under an intense heat. The entire body of him seemed as if to shrink in stature, although even at the last it still was larger than the normal human being. But, again, it was the face which held our gaze. God alone knows how long it took for the entire transformation to effect itself, but when it was done we were looking down at a face which was strange in its familiarity. I am not saying that we knew the features or had seen them before, because we had not. Yet I at least had expected, when I saw that the lines of his visage were turning more into normalcy, the result to be similar to the Aztec countenance. To my unease, such was not the case. The facial features strongly resembled those one might see in Madrid or any one of a hundred European cities. This man, and now he was such as could be called a *man*, was not of the New World but of the Old!

Quickly I gave the orders which Fra Pamphilo had directed I give. It was not a moment too soon, as from the outside of the sepulcher a musket fired, then another. Rushing out and down to the causeway I found that my officers had killed two of the priests and received the in-

telligence that, knowing what we were about to do, the priests had thrown themselves at the weapons in order to stop us. I waved the others back, shouting that the deed had been done, that we had saved their people from the cruel fiend who no longer would victimize them. But they would not listen.

The aftermath is well known to all. The resultant uprising was put down only by the returning General Cortez whom the Almighty sent to our aid in our hour of dire need.

Thus I pass from this incident to turn to subsequent events which include the death of Moctezuma and the victory of our armies, but before doing so I would add one further comment.

When the uprising began, all of my men on both sides of the lake were occupied with the battle, including the Reverend Father. It was a full day later when I sought to inquire whether the orders I had given in the sepulcher had been carried out. I could not find the two officers we had left behind us, so I inspected the interior of the place myself. There was no evidence of a fire having been set and there was no one inside. Neither my officers nor the fiend whose heart had been pierced by Fra Pamphilo's stake. Also the great casket with the strange soil had been removed; by whom I had no idea. I suspected that it might have been the work of the Indian priests, but Fra Pamphilo did not seem to agree with this theory. He would say nothing of what he believed, in fact would say nothing more at all of the business of that day, but I state with truth that never again did I lay eyes on the Reverend Father and see him smiling. Always he walked in a bowed manner, as if somehow he had been beaten at some crucial game, a grim expression a permanent part of his vestments of office.

"Your reaction?" Harmon asked. He had been reading the passage aloud, translating the old book from Latin into English as he went along.

"Could be the work of a crank," Cam said. "A lot of the invaders of the New World had pretty vivid imaginations. Ponce de Leon and his fountain of youth for one. And all those explorers who were looking for the kingdom of gold, El Dorado."

"That's always possible, yes. But there *was* a General Alvarado, and he *was* in charge during an absence from Tenochtitlan of Cortez, and there *was* an uprising of the Azecs—the aftermath of which was the death of Montezuma, or Moctezuma."

"And maybe the good Alvarado, some forty years later, decided he had to explain himself, and chose to invent some fantastic story about what happened. Probably, he just got a little too close to one of those *poor naked female children* himself. Or it could be a forgery. From what you've told me, there were a lot of fake reports from the New World being circulated around Europe at this time."

The professor considered the point, then dismissed it.

"The Egyptian *Book of the Dead* is above suspicion, and the passage regarding the Black Lord of Blood who 'feasts on the fresh-killed dead and avoids the rays of light' certainly is not spurious. And the same can be said of the Tibetan *Geneology of the Dragon* and its reference to the 'marauder of princesses and ladies-in-waiting, he who, though blessed with kinship to the divine serpent, was feared when the moon turned red with death.' And the other journals, Cam, coming from the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and written by intelligent if not scholarly men, two British and one French. What do you say of these passages? Are they

faked as well? Or are they fantastic flights of imagination? You yourself read the English language passages. Did they sound like charlatanism to you?"

"No, sir, they did not, but the human mind—"

"Is capable of playing some strange tricks on itself. I agree. But when several human minds which are separated by centuries and thousands of miles all play the same or similar tricks. . . Look at the evidence, Cam. One would think that the writer of the nineteenth century book, the Englishman, had been right there with General Alvarado. The stake in the heart, the fangs, the black cat—*black cat*, Cam."

"All right, but maybe he—the Englishman—had read the Alvarado remembrances, and then—"

"Again, that's *possible*. But what of this last book, this little leather-bound volume. *The Runes of Ktara*, it's called, this book that puts all of it together. Here—"

*He, black of flesh; I, black of fur,
It's his to lead, it's mine to serve
Until that day in morning light,
When he is weak, when gone is night,
When they—they—come and wrench apart
His living life, his pulsing heart.
Then I, his slave, at his last cry
Myself each time begin to die,
The process moving toward its end
Until I find the one to send,
The one who'll come, the one who'll take
From my Black Lord the killer stake.*

"And here," Harmon said, flipping the pages of the small book.

*The first land I remember well
It rose in fire, in ashes fell
But we, my Master and his slave,
Escaped the sea whose waters craved
All life on that past continent
Whose time the Old Gods cried was spent.
And as the seas took down its dead
My Master and his cat-slave fled.*

"The first land," Harmon repeated.

Cam nodded. "Atlantis is what I assume is being referred to. The past continent business and all, but—"

"But," Harmon interrupted. "It's all here, Cam, all of it. Here are sections dealing with the *yellow men of mountains high*—Tibet—and of the Egyptians on the Nile, and here she speaks of the Aztecs. Listen—"

*Beyond the pale we lived midst wealth
Until the Churchmen came in stealth.*

"Churchmen, the Spaniards who conquered in the name of their faith. It all fits."

"Fine," Cam replied. "But this woman who visited you tonight promised you two things. One was that she would tell you where to find this master of hers. The second was his name."

The professor grinned. "As to the first, I think she has done admirably. The latest document we have was written by that Englishman in the 1890's. He speaks of a place in modern-day Romania. Additionally, she gives us the exact location, once we are in the area of the old castle. Her directions are quite specific:"

*Down from the stony walk-wall high
In the brightness of the fullest moon,*

*A single arrow-shaft of light
Will pierce the ever-present gloom
To fall upon the rising stone
Which arcs over the river,
And lights with light the silent crypt
In which awaits my Giver.*

"And the name of this Giver or Master?" Cam asked.

"Again quite explicit. You noticed the several references to the Son of the Serpent or Son of the Dragon? I don't suppose that your Magyar is all that fluent these days, but that phrase translates into a word I think you'll recognize. *Draculya*—or *Dracula*."

Cam had been expecting something like this. "Very well. From all these pieces of literature of yours you've pieced together a good theory. I'll admit that the black cat I saw, together with the old woman who came earlier and the young woman you talked to all help to substantiate it. Plus the fact that the shelves fell down and opened all these books to the passages we've been dissecting. But I'm not sure that, even with all this, we should take the next step that I know you're thinking about. As far as I'm concerned—"

"Cam, I full intend to take that next step. As always, I hope I can count upon your assistance, but if you should feel that you cannot, I will understand."

Harmon paused, waiting for the response he knew was coming.

"I'm with you, sir. As always."

"Fine. Anyhow, there's one other fact I did not mention to you before, not that it slipped my mind but that I didn't feel was of importance in the total picture of things: You mentioned these pieces of *my* literature and,

in so doing, you were correct with one exception. You see, before I found it here tonight open on my study floor, I not only did not own but never even heard of *The Runes of Ktara*."

CHAPTER 4

As that gigantic fabrication of metal numbered 747 launched itself into the airways over Kennedy International, Cam Sanchez relaxed in his aisle seat and took from his jacket pocket a silver cigar lighter and a long black cheroot. When the seconds had passed and the No Smoking sign winked off, the lighter winked on. From the window seat beside him, Professor Harmon grimaced.

"I suppose I could have done without that," he said.

"Every man to his own vices," Cam replied. He was not a smoker normally, but he was afraid of airplanes. Turning a deaf ear and blind eye to accident statistics, his opinion was that flying in one of these metallic wrappers was a method of transportation that ranked in safety somewhere very close to going over Niagara Falls in a barrel—or, more accurately, without the barrel.

It was a little after 6:30 P.M. and the flight was due to land at Zurich at 8:30 the next morning. In actual flying time that was but eight hours away. In that eight-hour interval, they would be offered dinner. Then, after what-

ever sleep was possible in the interim, they would be served a breakfast that no one on board would really want but that no one on board would feel they could pass up. This was especially true of the lush servings that decorated the wheeled carts pushed before the first-class passengers. No, check that no one. The professor's long familiarity with wealth and its fruits made him immune to such considerations. Cam's long familiarity with the opposite made him vulnerable to all the temptations proffered by the airline's smiling stewardesses.

The main consideration, however, was that the night would be short and the following day no doubt would be longer than most. If they were lucky, that is. If all went as it was supposed to. If not, the following day might be very short for them both, and it might not have a successor.

Nothing that the professor's eyes were closed and that the ship's "entertainment center" earjacks were firmly in place, Cam adjusted his own jacks and leafed through the folder which served as his "individual menu of audio offerings." It was then he spotted "tonight's movie." Direct from the budget studios of a Hollywood company he had never heard of, the scheduled film was a monster flick. Vowing that he would be asleep before the magic screen lowered, he exhaled a gray cloud of cigar smoke.

Harmon coughed dramatically. Cam saw that his eyes remained closed, but that the corners of his mouth had formed into an unpleasant frown.

"All right, Professor. You win. The cigar goes into the ashtray."

As Harmon's mouth twitched its thanks, Cam reflected that something as small as a cheroot was not worth making an issue about. It was a very minor matter com-

pared with some of the other things he had taken issue with during the past three weeks.

No, check that, too. There really had been only one basic issue—the feasibility of the entire project. Cam had expressed it first in terms of whether or not it was necessary for them to get involved at all. It had been the day after the visit from the woman or cat or cat-woman Harmon now referred to as Ktara. The coming of the morning sun had done nothing to dispel the professor's enthusiasm of the night before. Somehow, to Cam, the spell of mystery he had been infected with then had evaporated with the coming of daylight.

"Look here, Professor—assuming that this Black Master did exist and that he is the same one as mentioned in all those texts and that *Rune* book—assuming all of that, why should we involve ourselves in the business of restoring him? We've done all right for ourselves up till now, haven't we?"

The professor had answered matter-of-factly. "We have. But think further, Cam. Think of what we can do when we have mastered a weapon such as he represents. And also think of this—what might happen if it is someone other than ourselves who releases the beast from his tomb. Think of the evil that might bring. Ktara means business, Cam. If we do not accept the 'honor' she has bestowed, I am certain she will find another, even though she seems to be running out of time. No, Cam, if the monster whose history has been traced for us is to be brought back to life at all, it must be by those who, like ourselves, can use him for desirable purposes. Of course, the course of action we contemplate is not without its problems."

Cam could not have agreed more with that last state-

ment. As to the specific problems, Harmon recognized four, three of which were logistical.

One: Getting to Romania and to the castle at the proper time. Easy enough. "There will be a number of formalities, but fortunately I have acquaintances in the proper places who can smooth the way for us."

Two: Getting Dracula and his coffin out of Romania and back into the United States. Not all that easy. "Several possibilities present themselves, but we shall have to give the matter a great deal of thought."

Three: Finding a suitable place for their headquarters upon their return, since the Manhattan brownstone was much too "public" a place. No difficulty at all, since Harmon owned a large rambling manor in Westhampton on southern Long Island. "Its fronting on the ocean will do perfectly for our purposes. There will have to be some renovation work done, and I will want much of my laboratory equipment transferred there. Also there are some new things I want to obtain. All of this we will set into motion today, after we visit the place. It has been a couple of years since I've been there."

The fourth problem, the non-logistical one, was, the professor said, "the trickiest. Namely, how we control the fiend subsequent to his liberation from the death-state."

During the night Harmon's brain had been working on this problem and with the help of hastily drawn diagrams of two devices he showed Cam what he had in mind. Basically the control consisted of two implants, one in himself and one in Dracula, both close to the heart.

"The one inside me is simple. Operated by a solenoid cell it emits a wave of energy, either sound or radio, I've not yet decided. The energy output will stop if either one of two things happens. The first is if my heart should stop beating—if, in other words, I should die. The second is

if I move this lever—internally, by telekinesis. My experiments have shown I have the ability to move much heavier objects farther, so that should be no difficulty. As Ktara rightly stated, my power is to be put to an important use.”

The second implant, next to Dracula’s heart, was a bit more complicated. “Here you see the receiver which is keyed to the signal from the device within myself. Should my signal stop, a small energy conversion will take place which, using the heat of *Dracula’s own blood*, will eject this small shaft into the vampire’s heart. The shaft itself will be fashioned from the stake we remove from him in his tomb.”

The two-part serial hook-up was ingenious but simple, Cam recognized. However, he saw difficulties regarding it. The first had to do with the actual implanting—how they got the things inside Dracula and the professor. Harmon had the answers ready.

“Dracula’s I insert myself—before the stake is pulled from him. A simple operation which can be accomplished in little time. As to my own, that will take some doing, but I have a surgeon friend who I think will accommodate us.”

Two further matters, Cam replied.

“The energy source to emit the beam from you. If you’re going to keep it strong enough, it will have to be recharged periodically.”

“Correct. I thought of using my own blood as the source, but the power factor would be too low. You’re right, of course, and I will order the components of the recharge device with the other things I’ll be needing. The control devices themselves I’ll be able to fashion with materials already on hand. The second matter?”

“Blood,” Cam said.

Harmon repeated the word with raised eyebrows.

"Yes, blood," Cam said again. "If all we've read of this Dracula is correct, he feeds on blood. Just how were you planning to provide for his needs?"

A chemical compound, was the professor's answer. He was certain he could devise one that would be satisfactory. "Now, before we get going to work, is there anything else bothering you?"

Cam had hesitated, then responded. "Just the whole idea of the thing. If all of those stories of this Black Master are true, I have the unsettling feeling that we might be biting off more than we can chew—much more, Professor."

To this, Professor Damien Harmon had had no ready response.

They prepared. The Westhampton house was inspected, notes were taken, and repair work contracted for. Money was no object; speed was what counted. Equipment needs were listed and ordered from far-flung manufacturers. Again, money was no object, just speedy delivery; everything had to be on hand prior to their return from abroad. Passports and visas were obtained without difficulty—even in the three specific instances where these documents were forged. The two implant devices were constructed and, after repeated testing, Harmon was satisfied that they would do the job they had been designed to do.

There was only one thing remaining, and on a bright sunny Saturday morning, Damien Harmon checked secretly into a private hospital in Queens. Two days later he left the hospital, and six days after that he and Cameron Sanchez boarded the 747 which would take them on the first leg of their travels spanning an ocean and half

a continent, as well as the Twentieth Century and another, earlier time. In the course of events, they would traverse the bridge from the natural world over into another dimension which, for most people, makes itself known only in nightmares.

CHAPTER 5

Extending inland from the Black Sea halfway across the Balkan peninsula and spanning a large elliptical area of slightly less than 92,000 square miles—an area about the size of the states of New York and Pennsylvania combined—the Socialist Republic of Romania occupies the greater part of the V-shaped lower basin of the Danube River system and the hilly eastern regions of the Middle Danube basin. The country lies on both sides of the Carpathian and Transylvanian Alpine mountain system which, with the Balkan Mountains, forms a natural barrier between the two Danube basins. In the past two centuries, Romania has served as the natural gateway for Russian expansion in the Balkans and the Mediterranean basin.

A land containing such a “natural gateway” often has, because of that gateway, an accompanying history of violence. Romania’s twenty-three-century history echoes with the din of battle and the splash of the blood of Slavs, Magyars, Turks, Germans, and Russians. These,

just a few of the more modern races which, in the name of God or Country, have tried to exterminate each other within Romania's present borders. While used to having their land dominated by a foreign nation, the Romanians traditionally have found practical ways to adapt to the outside power source. Traditionally, they have ignored it, preferring to go their own ways regardless of the outward forms those ways may have to take. This is the manner in which, today, the some twenty million Romanian Communists handle their relations with their Russian neighbor to the north.

The two-jet aircraft set its wheels down at the Bucharest Airport at 6:30 P.M. local time. Harmon had arranged a chartered plane to meet their 747 at Zurich. As the twin-jet taxied off the runway, Harmon peered tensely through his own window and the one on Cam's side. Outside the United States and nominally "friendly" countries, there was never any guarantee that the Harmon financial influence could make itself felt effectively. Always, at the last moment, something could go wrong and the man who was to be sure that no untimely questions would be asked of the two American travelers who were here for a short stay, might be called away from duty. That could happen almost anywhere, even in this more flexible part of the Soviet curtain.

The professor sighed with relief. The black limousine moving out to meet the plane looked official, all right, but it was not the official look of the police or the military. And as Cam assisted him to the rear door of the car, he could see that the passenger inside looked anything but official. While Cam took the seat next to the driver, Harmon extended his right hand. The passenger, a salt-and-peppery bearded gentleman looking about ten years his senior, grasped it eagerly. He waited until he had given

instructions to the driver in Romanian and the car was in motion before he spoke to the professor in Oxfordian English.

"I directed him to drive us immediately to Pitesti as you requested. I assume this is still your wish, Damien?"

Harmon smiled. "It is. Alex, I'd like you to meet my associate, Cameron Sanchez. Cam, I've told you of Dr. Thorka."

He had. Alexandru Thorka now worked as an archeologist loosely attached to the University of Bucharest. He and Professor Harmon had met years ago at a Harvard-sponsored seminar in North African studies, and the two had corresponded over the years. Cam noted that the handshake shared by the two intellectuals was warm and genuine. He reflected to himself that there were few men in this world that Damien Harmon greeted as an equal. It was natural, therefore, that his own respect for Dr. Alexandru Thorka moved up several notches.

"You are looking well, Alex," Harmon said.

"And you, Damien. You are a sight to these old eyes of mine, and perhaps, too, an example that many should follow, bandying about the world as you do."

"I do not travel all that much, my old friend."

"That may be as it may be, Damien. I do wish, however, you would extend your stay a little, perhaps spending some time with me here in Bucharest. After all, Pitesti is not the most cultured of places. Here in Bucharest—"

"Thank you, Alex, but my schedule does not allow me the time. You know how it is among us older people. We really do not have the hours to squander that we once did. Not even the pleasant squandering that you suggest."

Thorka nodded. "I understand, Damien, I do wish you would reconsider traveling to the northwest tonight,

however. The drive is very refreshing by daylight, and you would have the benefits of a good night's rest in comfortable surroundings which, I'm afraid, I shall not be able to offer you once we arrive at Pitesti."

"I'm sure the accommodations will be excellent there," Harmon countered. "And I really do want to be in Pitesti tonight. I have my reasons, Alex."

"I am certain you do, Damien," Thorka said. He then looked thoughtfully out the window of his side of the car. "Damien, I have not asked you why you are here or why you wish to visit Pitesti."

Harmon smiled, "For which I thank you, Alex. I'm sure you must be curious."

"I am in a way, yes. But I suppose that deep within me I do not wish to know precisely. I can only caution you against. . ." He seemed to be groping for the right words, then: "I would caution you against doing anything rash."

"At my age, Alex?"

Harmon had voiced his question in a good-natured chuckle. Thorka did not seem to notice the humor. If he did, he ignored it.

"Damien, it has not been lost upon me that your requests were most precise as to date and time, requests which on the face of it would seem peculiar, coming as they do from a man who has abundant wealth and is retired from active work." He raised a hand. "Oh, I know—you are a busy man, yes. But why make your plans so precise—why arrive on *this* date, at *this* hour, rather than a more loose schedule? There is no special national holiday which coincides with your visit, no special affair of state. And, anyway, even if there were you would not necessarily wish to observe them in Pitesti."

Again the professor chuckled. "Perhaps, then, my visit coincides with nothing at all."

Still Thorka did not take the grim expression from his face. "It coincides, Damien, with one event that anyone with a properly marked calendar and sharp eyesight could confirm. The fullness of the moon."

The sixty-five-mile trip from Bucharest took a little over two hours, the limousine making top speeds where it could, but having to slow for the intervening towns of Potlogi, Titu-Tirg, Gaesti, Valea Mare and Topoloveni where, as if on signal, the road would fill with teeming life, human and animal, all moving at a pace which a snail would envy. Within the car, conversation seemed forced, the Romanian obviously hesitating to ask embarrassing questions about Harmon's purpose here, and concentrating mostly on things both already knew through past correspondence—the state of old associates, projects completed and planned, et cetera. For the most part, Cam stayed out of the talk, except at one point when Thorka, at a loss for something to say to his old friend, asked a question of his young associate. The manner was direct and abrupt, in the traditional Romanian style.

"Young man, I trust you will forgive my curiosity and impertinence, but I am intrigued by your hair—or rather the complete absence of it. Unless I am wrong, your name is Spanish, and complete baldness strikes me as being rather rare among that race—for one so young, mind you."

Cam turned and smiled at the doctor. "Frankly, sir, it strikes me exactly the same way. It has since I was thirteen years old when I lost it all in one fell swoop."

The Romanian's eyebrows raised, "Some exotic disease."

"Around home, our name for it was *malnutrition*."

"Astounding!" Thorka said to Harmon. "Yet, he's turned out rather well."

Harmon winked at Cam. "A regular symbol of the American Dream."

With the exception of that one interlude, Cam kept his attention on the passing countryside. Born and raised in New York City, he always found real countryside fascinating, whether it was the greenery of upstate New York by sunlight or this darkening Romanian landscape. He knew, of course, that at heart he was a city creature, an everlasting product of the concrete canyons of humanity. Yet he had often wondered about the physical reality of Puerto Rico, the land he considered his spiritual home. Once Professor Harmon had told him that he should go there, at least to visit, to see with his own eyes the land that held such importance in his mind, but he had refused. "No. I don't think I'll ever see Puerto Rico. I'm afraid. It might not come up to the standards I have given it."

And yet he could gaze with half-closed eyes at the farmers and their pushcarts and extrapolate from that his mythical island in the Caribbean. These hard-working agrarians so simple a people were, without the duplicity which comes from sophistication. So simple their lives and their philosophies in which good was easily identifiable as good, and evil easily known as evil. That he reached this last thought at the moment Doctor Thorka spoke next made a chill run down his spine.

"Here. This one last bridge, over the Arges, and we are in Pitesti."

Looking down from the bridge, the dark waters of the river looked as if they embodied the very evil Cam had been thinking of. It was the silver ripple on its churning

surface that made him look upward and see what he had not seen before. He wondered whether he had wanted to ignore the fact that overhead the full moon now cast its spell on this part of the planet. Those who speak in the name of Science, capital S, say the earth controls the moon; but what, really, did the men of Science know? True, they could tell you how to do electronic things that looked miraculous, truly magical—but then they pointed out that, fundamentally, they could not tell you *why* something behaved the way it did.

Who among men really could tell you why? Those steeped in religion and philosophy had their ideas about it, but were they right? Or were the old grandmothers—the *abuelas*—right when they talked of the moon as now a Lover's Moon, now a Devil's Moon, and then a Fortunate Moon? A moon is a moon is a moon. So said these of Science and the young schoolboys learning the ways of civilization they had been born into. "You believe that, Cameron?" responded the beloved old *abuela*, looking at the little boy through eyes which contained both wisdom and pain. "Then you believe that, if it comforts you. If it does not, you come and ask your old grandmother about what the books you are reading have to say. Is the moon weaker than a book? Is nature weaker than concrete? You look and see where the earth in a shrug has moved sidewalks and buildings, then you tell me all of Science and what it says is the rightful place of the angels and those that oppose them. You look, *then* you tell. In the meantime, young scholar, you eat your supper—*pronto!*"

You look and then you tell. No longer, Cameron Sanchez thought to himself, no longer was there a grandmother to tell. But it was a fact that now—perhaps for

the first time—he was actually looking. And the prospect was far from reassuring.

They had crossed the Arges River and Cam noted that the Romanian was looking out the window on his side and upward at a rocky pinnacle bathed in moonlight. He also saw that now Harmon had leaned over to get the same view.

“Castle Dracula,” the professor said.

Thorka exhaled slowly. “You wish to see the ruins in the morning?”

Harmon shook his head. “Of course I want to see the ruins. Is there anything else in the region worth seeing? But not in the morning. Tonight.”

“Damien, you are right about one thing,” Thorka said. “The castle may well be the only attraction worthy of your attention. But you are quite wrong about the other thing. No one ever goes up there at night.”

“You mean no one of the village people.”

“I mean *no* one.”

“You, Alex—superstitious?”

Thorka tried to manage a smile but failed. “Cautious, my friend. Merely cautious. If you wish my assistance—the pathways are brutal and your physical condition demands assistance—you shall have to wait until morning.”

“Very well, Alex. Cam will supply all the assistance I require, but I must see the castle tonight.”

“Then we shall drive directly to our lodgings and complete the formalities of registering. After that, I shall retire with a good book—if I can find one—and let you have the car. Ring me when you return and we shall have a cognac or two. If, that is, it is not too late.”

Thorka gave such weight to his last sentence that Cam was not at all sure the “too late” he referred to had to do with the hour.

They said good-by to the Romanian at the hostel and Cam drove the short distance they had to travel along the river road. Within minutes they were approaching the village of Arefu from which, according to the research Harmon had done, a pathway moved upward to the top of the mountain where the castle ruins perched. They did not enter the village proper, but parked the car off the side of the ill-repaired road. Now came the hard part, Cam thought to himself. He would have to carry the professor to the top on his back. From the journal he knew that the climb would not be easy. Yet this was in the nature of a physical task, and physical things he could cope with. As for what was to come later. . .

He assembled the special aluminum backframe which he had devised from a trail-pack and, bending down below the door sill of the car, balanced himself as the professor—his strong hands gripping the seating-assist and doorpost—swung his legs into place. When Harmon, himself wearing a small back-pack containing the implant and other items they would need, had buckled himself close to Cam's back in a sort of piggy-back fashion which placed most of his weight upon the bearer's shoulders, Cam started off in long strides.

The beginning of the pathway was not difficult to locate. Here, the once-thick foliage had long ago been cleared for upward passage. It was fortunate they arrived at this point when they did. They would not have found it so easily without the light of the moon. Suddenly—just as they began the uphill climb—they were plunged into darkness as the moon was covered by moving clouds. If that made the going rough, ten minutes later something else made it even rougher. Cam put it succinctly.

"We've run out of trail."

Harmon, from his higher vantage point, could see that

they had indeed run out of pathway. But the way was clear, even in the poor light. He directed Cam to the left with a low chuckle.

"Nothing in this life comes easily, Cameron. Nothing worth the having, that is."

"Right now some moonlight would be worth the having."

"True. And I am confident that we shall have it—precisely when we *need* it. In the meantime use the flashlight."

Cam knew what the professor meant as he switched on the light the professor had taken from his pack. He definitely did not mean that they would have it during their—their? *his!*—climb. He meant they would have it when, according to Harmon's value scale, they *really* would need it. When they reached the top and *had* to have a moon in order to witness what the *Runes of Ktara* poetically called her "single arrow-shaft of light." Cam felt he might not be at all happy to see the clouds uncover the moon then.

But now was a completely different story. He held back his curses as he ran into tree branches and stubbed his boots on roots that sadistically twisted up from the ground. It seemed as though they wanted to bring him and his burden down. That he remained upright he attributed to his own strength and agility. His strength held until the angular plane he had been ascending converged with another angle. This, in turn, went almost straight up into the lightless sky.

"The footholds," Harmon said. "Look for them. They can't be far from this spot."

They weren't. Cam found them about ten yards off to his right. But he didn't like what he found.

"Not really built for big feet like mine," he said.

The professor laughed. "Unfortunately, even though they're smaller, we can't use mine. Press on, Cameron."

Cameron pressed on, now concentrating his memory on the passages of the Englishman's book which dealt with the ascent he and his companions had made up the mountain. They had made it, and there was no reason he could not. Of course, they didn't have a heavy old man strapped to their backs. But two of the party had been an old man and a girl. And none of them had his strength, which he hoped would compensate. But the two violent earthquakes that shook this region in 1914 and 1940 could have done some terrain-moving that might make his reasoning worthless.

And indeed, as they moved from ledge to ledge, from handhold and foothold to more difficult versions of the same, they could see that the quakes had taken their toll on the face of the mountain itself and in the castle above. Although they could not now see the structure that was their destination, they could see parts of it. Or rather, elements that once had been parts of it. The trail—if what Cam now struggled with could be called that—was full of crevice-locked bits of brick and honed boulder.

They had estimated that the climb would take under an hour. It took an hour and fifteen minutes. When Cam finally felt his feet resting horizontally—or almost so—on flat earth, he inhaled deeply and relaxed his pent-up lungs. The air was cool and should have been refreshing, but it wasn't. There was a certain staleness about it. Cam had experienced this kind of air before. At cemeteries. And this place looked like a place of the dead.

Castle Dracula!

Even now it looked formidable, this immense pile of

stone upon stone. Fire and earthquake and the ravages of time itself had had their effect on its towers and battlements, but it rose defiantly skyward from the small plain area upon which it stood. It seemed to tell nature's green creeping vines and nauseous pallid parasitic growths that no force directed against it would break its backbone. Certainly in the days when it had served as the main defense to the mountain range that it surveyed it had done its duty well. From its peaks—indeed, from the ground from which it rose—it commanded a view of the terrain in all directions. Legend said that, of all the attacks that had been launched against it, not one had forced the castle into submission. Legends attributed this to the valor of the men defending the structure, but legends have a way of doing that. There was something in the stones themselves, something that the smell of mildew and rot could not defeat. . . .

A castle in ruins. But the legends lived on. And Cam suspected that, somewhere within, within or under the half-fallen towers and walls that now met his eyes, there still existed the willful spirit of Castle Dracula. Defiant, strong, and dangerous.

Viewing the structure, a more practical concern entered his mind. He had not realized that he and Harmon had been silent for some time until he heard his own words break that calm. His words somehow sounded irreverent, flip.

"'The stony walk-wall high.' The one your cat-girl wrote about. You think it's still there?"

"Yes. I'm confident it's very much still there, Cam. Or we would not have been brought this far."

Since they *had* been brought this far, Cam trudged on toward the stone piles. As they drew closer, the building's facade looked even more dramatic than before—almost

artistic in a macabre way—like a piece of driftwood that had been jammed into the sand, its sharp edges cracked at odd angles. In minutes he was carrying the professor through the doorless arch that led into a room filled with rubble that had been floor and ceiling structure high above. As his bootheel suddenly clacked loudly against the stone, he recalled the words the Englishman had written almost a century ago.

Our foot-bottoms, although set down with extreme care to avoid sound (God knows why, since we had little to fear from the fiend now that the sun warmed the earth), clicked noisily upon the polished stone floor so that the echoes stabbed our ears with arrows of warning.

Arrows of warning, Cam reflected. What arrows of warning would ever convince Damien Harmon that he was trespassing where a man, regardless of his superiority among other men, should beware to walk? Walk. That was the amusing part, if Cam Sanchez had been in the mood to be amused. He was doing the walking.

With that thought, he took a cheroot from his jacket pocket and lit it.

Harmon did not voice an objection.

Well, moon, we're ready when you are, Cam thought to himself. They had found a usable stairwell and were now up on one of the high battlements. Cam had placed Harmon down at the top of the stone stairs and stepped up to the walkway. As he looked down into the gloomy dark, he could see the lights of Arefu and, farther down the river, the brighter and more abundant lights of Pitesti. What they were missing was the one light that was essential to their task on this mountain top.

Taking one final drag on the spent cigar, he flipped it

toward the river, watching the red ash-end disappear in the blackness. He turned back toward Harmon.

"We've got the first part of your night visitor's directions. This thing I'm standing on more than qualifies as a stony walk-wall. It's high and pretty long—at least thirty feet in length. But where's the second essential?"

"Patience, Cameron. We were not brought here just to roam these rocks in darkness."

"Suppose we're too late—or too early? Wherever this shaft of light leads to is controlled by two things. One of them is our being on the right part of the wall to see it. The other is the position of the moon itself. Suppose right now it's in the right place but the clouds are covering it?"

Harmon's voice seemed curiously untroubled. "For someone who was opposed to our locating the tomb, you've suddenly become mighty anxious."

Cam laughed shortly in spite of himself. "Maybe I don't like mountain climbing that serves no purpose."

"Patience, Cam. Your full moon will be out at the right moment. And I have the feeling that the moment is approaching with all speed."

Cam looked upward. The cloud cover did not appear to be breaking up. He said as much to Harmon.

"Perhaps, but it will by the time you get to the proper place on the wall."

"And just how am I supposed to know where that is?"

"I suggest," Harmon replied, "I suggest that you simply follow the leader."

As Cam looked back toward his companion, he saw a small shadow detach itself from the general area of the older man's legs. Moving low on the steps in a slow but graceful manner, it was not until it came up onto the

top level that Cam recognized it for what it was. It was a large cat, black in color, but somehow it did not resemble the cat he had chased in Manhattan only weeks ago. The size was right but the frame now looked thinner. And the animal's movement lacked the swiftness of the other. The coat was not a shiny black but more of a dull gray dotted with white. And the eyes. . .

Yes, the eyes said it all. Those of the other had been bright in their yellow greenness. These—

Myself each time begin to die were the words of Ktara's books. The animal looked older than any cat species Cam had ever seen.

The cat reached the place where he stood, and, seeming not to recognize his presence, passed around him. The slight brush of its fur on his pant's leg made him shiver. Follow the leader the professor had said. Cam followed the animal along the ridge of rock until it stopped some twenty feet from where he had stood. As the cat halted, it slowly looked in Cam's direction. Appearing to assure itself that he was where he was supposed to be, it then looked down into the gloom of the valley below. Following the animal's eyes Cam could see that in one way this was a better vantage point than the other had been. He could now see that between the lights of Pitesti and the castle, fairly close by the ruin, were a number of jutting rocky spires that could themselves have been parts of castles long in the past. From his reading, however, he knew that there had been no such castles, on this side of the river at least, for several centuries. They were natural formations—although they looked anything but natural in the vague light. And one of them, he knew held something especially unnatural. One of them, he knew, was the rising stone of Ktara's location poem.

But which one? Without the moon. . .

Something inside him told him he was looking in the wrong direction. Turning them to his left he saw the cat. He had expected to see the animal as it had been, sitting on its haunches, waiting with the same kind of patience that the professor had exhibited. He did not expect to see what he saw.

The cat, now turned so that its back was to the valley, lifted its head upward and stared at the black-gray sky above. Its eyes were shut tight, then they suddenly opened. Instead of the dullness Cam had observed in them before, there was a bright-white quality within them, not hot-white but snow-cold, an ice-fire that seemed to flash and then promptly died. The eyes closed, then opened. As the cat repositioned itself on the high wall, Cam could see its eyes had returned to dull yellow. Suddenly he saw something else.

The moon.

First it was as if a crack had appeared low in the night sky, a crack through which a pale yellow flame—much like the eyes of the animal—shone down upon the mountain top. Then, as the clouds seemed to part, to move in all directions outward from the flame at its center, the full orb of the moon revealed itself in an icy glowing white beam that suggested the temporary state of the eyes of the cat when it had—

Cam shook his head. The entire mood of this place plus that of their mission was macabre enough without his imagining the supernatural where a natural explanation probably—

But when he looked down into the valley. Trees and earth and rocks now glared a dull unholy gray. The crag-fingers he had seen jutting upward before, now looked like upturned icicles formed a million years ago, left as

memorials of some unremembered Ice Age that the gods had decided to terminate. Cam was about to turn from the sight when something new caught his eye.

It was like the book had said:

A single arrow-shaft of light.

He watched it as it touched the ground of the hillside, watched it as it moved imperceptibly downward on the dark earth and the rocks, then upward until it rose—

To fall upon the rising stone.

It had to be the large rock that appeared to have fallen from the top of the mountain and lodged at the base of the jutting finger of stone now bathed in the light of the full moon. Even had the cat not jumped up on its side and checked to be sure her human followers had gotten the message, there were no other rocks in a similar position. The rock had to be moved, there was no doubt about it.

Cam said nothing as he placed his hands on the uphill side of the boulder, maintaining the silence that had been kept since he had gone from the wall to the professor. He had answered Harmon's questioning eyes with a short nod and nothing more. Not a word passed as he assisted the professor into the pack-frame, and they moved downward through and out the castle interior. When they moved to a point where they could see the white-lighted rock, Cam felt Harmon's breath catch, but that was all.

They were nearing the climax of their quest and each for his own reasons felt that to speak, to say anything, would be inappropriate somehow.

The stone looked heavy. Cam was therefore surprised when, with very little effort on his part, it dislodged easily and began to roll downward. During the boulder's descent, Cam's eyes stayed glued to its path as it picked up speed

and bumped irregularly off rocks and trees. Then it came to rest in a thicket of unyielding evergreens with a final splintering crash. Eager as the professor must have been, Cam did not feel any nervous movement on his back. Filling his lungs with cool night air, he flicked on his flashlight and turned to the place where the stone had been.

It was as he'd expected. A gaping hole in the rock. And, at the base of the hole, worn by time and the elements, crumbling steps leading downward.

The cat leaped into the hole. They followed.

Before leaving New York their research on the area had turned up the fact that the original construction of Castle Dracula in the fifteenth century had included a maze of tunneling between mountain top and the lowlands in several directions. Tunnels below ground were a normal feature in those days. First and foremost, they were a means of last-resort escape for the nobility in the event of an attack that could not be repulsed. Additionally, the underground networks also functioned as hiding places and, in special hollowed-out compartments, prisons and torture chambers. No doubt the other openings into—and out of—the underground stone chambers which once formed part of the castle complex were closed. This thought was not one to cheer Cameron Sanchez as they moved downward. If something went wrong, there would be only this route of escape—a route which, built in a generation when men were smaller, gave this overlarge man of the present very little elbow room. This was complicated by the added burden he carried on his back.

They went down in a straight line for what felt like hours, could have been seconds, but probably was three or four minutes. Then around to the left and through a

level way of stone of the same kind that composed the stairs, wallways, and low ceilings. Then through a door, or part of one. The animal led them. It crawled slowly through the opening left by the rotted wood. In one flat-soled thrust of his boot, Cam wrenched the door to the stone floor. There had been no sound of impact, at least not as much as Cam might have expected. Only the soft crumbling of the decayed matter into what seemed to be thousands of small fragments. They left the air filled with a powdery mist that for a time reflected in the beam of the flashlight like swirling sand. An odor of rot, a smell of dead primeval things, lingered in the air.

Training his light directly ahead, Cam stooped low and crossed the threshold.

The room was round, small. Only one object lay within. A heavy casket formed of grotesquely worked metal and stone sat directly in the center.

Leaping on the great lid of the dreadful thing, the cat looked across the room at the two men. With arched back, the animal bared its teeth in a hissing challenge. Or so Cam interpreted it. The professor evidently took it as a command.

"Our guide is impatient, it seems. Let's get to it."

In minutes they were ready. From within his trail-pack Harmon brought forth the five candles to illuminate the underground room. He used two telescoping aluminum crutches to balance himself as he leaned against the side of the casket. At his side he had a black bag that looked very much like that which a doctor might carry to a patient's home.

They moved swiftly, but still the cat hissed at them.

The professor nodded. "All right, Princess, hop yourself down from there and we shall proceed."

The cat jumped down. Harmon looked across the casket at Cam.

“Now, my friend. Open the coffin.”

Immediately, the cat purred.

CHAPTER 6

The facial features strongly resembled those one might see in Madrid or any one of a hundred European cities. That was how Pedro de Alvarado had put it. As Cam shined the flashlight in the coffin he agreed. The man—

No, not man, but something in its guise. What stretched before him could not be human.

It was not the great size of the figure. He did not look taller or heavier than Cam himself. It was nothing so much in the face, either—except, perhaps, for the slight curl of the lips that suggested a smile. A smile of anticipation.

What it was. . .

It was the perfection of . . . whatever it—he—was. His thick hair was combed neatly back, not a single strand out of place. The sharp angular cheek and bone structure, combined with the thick brows that nearly met at the bridge of his Roman nose, gave the face a dignified nobility. He appeared to be in his late forties or early fifties. And his clothing—formal, impeccable black-tie

attire—was perfectly pressed. Even the red carnation in his lapel appeared fresh, as if it had been plucked from the castle grounds that very night. He looked like a gentleman dozing after a satisfying dinner. Or he would have, and it not been for the thick wooden stake that had been driven through his heart.

“Quickly, Cam. The sliver.”

From inside his jacket, Cam brought a thick-bladed knife. His left hand reached out to grasp the stake, to hold it firm as he made his cut. The hand stopped inches from the upright piece of wood. Quickly the hand moved back and took the knife. With his right hand Cam hurriedly crossed himself. He looked up sharply, a defiant feeling surging within him. He wanted to see how Harmon had reacted to his motion. But Harmon’s eyes were directed toward the protruding stake, and did not reveal to Cam whether his employer had taken any notice of his action. A flush came to his cheeks as, with a sharp slap, he thrust the knife handle back into his right hand.

Again he reached out his left hand and once more, as if with a will of its own, it halted. But this time its owner pushed it forward until the tips of his fingers came into contact with the dreadful piece of wood. A cold feeling ran from his hand through his wrist and thick forearm. He flexed his powerful muscles to warm them. The cold arrow was much too strong, and the chill penetrated his resistance and permeated the body and brain of the man whose fingers now curled and powerfully gripped the stake.

“Careful,” Harmon warned. “Don’t jar the stake itself. Just cut the sliver from the top. *Very* gently.”

It was not as easy as it sounded. First, Cam’s left hand which held the stake wanted to lift the entire thing from its lodging place. Second, as sharp as the blade was, the

wood resisted the bite of the steel. It was only through tense concentration of strength and will power that, finally, a downward thrust of the stake combined with an upward pull on the knife took from the larger piece of wood a long thin sliver. Beads of sweat rolled down Cam's forehead as he exhaled with relief and handed it to Harmon.

"I'll need the knife too."

Wiping his brow, Cam leaned against the damp wall of the underground crypt and watched in the candlelight as Harmon extracted from his black bag a number of scalpels and an egg-shaped blue plastic-covered device about the size of a small filbert nut. This was the control unit which was to be inserted next to the vampire's heart. All it lacked was the small needle of wood which, as Cam watched, Harmon whittled down to the correct thickness and length. He placed one end into an opening at one end of the blue egg. Satisfied that it had locked into place, Harmon then sanded to a sharp point the tiny portion of the sliver which remained exposed. He then brought from his bag a small vial of clear glass. Uncapping it, he immersed the sliver point in the pale fluid within the vial. It was a hardening agent, and would keep the end of the stake splinter as sharp as a flint arrow-point.

"Now, let us see if our relay tests out," Harmon said. He rolled the little egg rapidly between his palms to heat it. Then he extended the device to Cam.

Taking it from the professor's hand, Cam watched the older man's eyes focus on the sliver point. Almost before his own eyes could move to the same location, he felt the egg jump slightly in his fingers. The sliver had extended its full length from its shell.

"Stage two," Harmon said with a thin smile. And in-

stantly the piece of now petrified wood retreated, leaving only its point showing as before. "Satisfied, Cam?"

The big man nodded. He was aware that the "test" was in reality more a final demonstration for his benefit. He had seen the feat performed several times back in New York and had no doubt that the professor's telekinetic skill could trip the relay whenever called upon to do so. The device was ingenious and all known potential difficulties had been anticipated. Still, as Cam watched Harmon unfasten the clothing covering the vampire's upper torso, he was not completely satisfied. He did not doubt the older man's skill as a surgeon, just as he did not doubt that all precautions had been considered and taken. But covering all the known bases might not be good enough. Not when the entire scheme centered upon what fundamentally was an unknown quantity itself. Harmon had once said to him, paraphrasing a seventeenth-century scientist, that the natural can be defined by the things we know and the supernatural by things we don't know—yet. And as he watched Harmon's scalpel making its first incision, Cam reflected that there still were many things in this world that scientists could not explain. And he remembered again that his old grandmother had her explanations which, although unlike those of the scientists, were just as sound. But he did not want to think of his *abuela* and her explanations—especially now he did not want to think of them. Minutes later he was forced to.

"Look here, Cam. It's miraculous!"

Harmon had implanted his control device and had closed the hole in the flesh in preparation to suture the folds. He now stared in wonder at his incisions. Cam saw why when he looked into the casket.

Before their eyes the flesh was healing itself, closing layer upon layer without benefit of needle or thread,

joining together as if there had been no intrusion. Indeed, moments later the smooth skin they inspected held not even the trace of a scar. Cam shot a glance at the face of the vampire. Had something they had done brought the creature back to life prematurely? But the features remained unchanged.

"A miracle," Harmon said.

Cam again made the sign of the cross. *Miracle* was not a word to be used lightly. He suspected it was not a word to be used at all in connection with the being who lay before them.

The professor placed all his surgical implements back into his black bag. Then he manipulated his crutches so as to move himself to the foot of the casket. As he did so, the ancient cat stepped up the pitch of its purring. Cam knew what was coming next, knew what Harmon's next words would be. He dreaded hearing them.

"Now. Pull it out. Pull the stake."

Clenching his teeth, Cam pushed his two huge hands outward toward the wooden safeguard that had kept the vampire in his place for almost a century. It was still cold to the touch, but as his fingers tightened about the thick shaft, the wood itself did not seem to resist their touch. Imagination, perhaps, but it seemed as if it welcomed being freed from the breast of the being it now impaled. Thus it was that with barely any effort on his part, Cam felt the stake lift, pull itself from the flesh which surrounded it. The flesh seemed to assist by pushing from below. Before his conscious mind had registered the fact, Cam held the freed stake in his hands; the sharpened tip dripped dark red blood.

"There! *Again!*" Harmon said, and Cam knew before looking that the gap in the vampire's breast was closing of itself. And then—

The stake clattered to the stone floor as the eyes of the vampire opened.

Opened and closed. Then nothing—until the mouth began to move, to twitch slightly, then to widen into a thin-lipped smile. The eyes opened again and the thick but tapered fingers of the creature flexed and moved with leisure to the sides of the coffin.

His smile even wider, Count Dracula sat up.

“I am told you speak English, albeit I am given to understand a very strange English.”

It was an unusual sentence to mark his first words of conversation. The statement would have been more appropriate at a diplomatic reception in one of the hundreds of governmental capitals of the world. It was certainly strange where it was issued—under the earth of an ancient dark mountain top overlooking an insignificant town of peasant farmers. But perhaps there were no words of human speech that could satisfactorily evoke the atmosphere of this underground room, and the fact that he who spoke them did so from a casket in which, until seconds ago, he had lain as if dead.

If there was a proper response to the statement, no one gave it. In the silence that followed, as Count Dracula's eyes moved from Harmon to Cam and then back to Harmon, both men noticed their black centers and the red lines of their pupils. As their focus shifted, tiny white bursts in their exact centers appeared and disappeared.

His voice was deep, an operatic richness about it, and carried a thick accent not totally unlike that which Cam had noted in Dr. Thorka's speech. It shared a quality with that of Ktara's, as if he, like her, was not used to

speaking—in any language. As if he found the act of speech itself a cumbersome method of communication.

Nonetheless, when he took his eyes from Harmon and located the cat . . . he spoke with the tongue—although in a strange language of short and varied pitches that seemed to bespeak thoughts that had long disappeared from the face of the planet.

The cat purred softly. It was still large, but it was no longer old. Previously, that had been its most singular feature. Its thick black coat shimmered in the candlelight like no other fur Cam had ever seen. More lustrous and elegant than any other member of its species. It was far different from the ancient animal that had led them here, and from the New York counterpart as well. Yet all were the same creature, were they not? The question remained unanswered for the time being. Dracula had returned his attention to Harmon and himself.

“My sweet Ktara has again used her resources to free me from the bonds of death. I am grateful to her as I have been in the past, yet I know she does it because she must. It is a task at which, without regard to rewards or unpleasanties, she must not fail, else she is lost forever. Whereas I . . . though I lie for a thousand years in some forgotten land, I remain as you have seen me. I depend upon Fate alone if need be—to send perhaps an earthquake to jar loose the stake that impales my soul.”

The laugh that followed was most unpleasant.

“Professor Harmon. I offer you also my gratitude, though you were but an instrument of Ktara’s will. It is with some reluctance that I inform you that your blood—and that of your assistant—will be the first to satisfy my hunger this night.”

Again the vampire laughed.

“Ah? You think this wrong of me? Know, then, that

all of those who in the past have pulled the stake from me have ended this way. I do not feel it especially dishonorable. After all, those who pull the stake do because they wish something from me. I, in turn, wish something from them. It is in the nature of things that I prevail. Is that not simple, Professor?

The structure of the vampire's face began to change. Slowly, almost meltingly, it took on the features the sixteenth-century Spaniard had described so well. Under thickening eyebrows, the nose began to flatten and flare at the edges. The eyes grew larger, contained in thickening lids. The lips began to curl backward, making space for the teeth that were growing into what Alvarado had aptly termed finger-length fangs. It was not until the vampire had started a movement to lift himself from the casket that Harmon spoke. His tone was level:

"Count Dracula, it is *not* that simple. I strongly suggest you stay exactly where you are. If, that is, you really wish to remain among the living."

Dracula's voice was in a deeper register when he responded. Flashing his eyes toward Cam, then at the stake on the stone floor, he grinned. His face hideously resembled the stone gargoyles of medieval architecture.

"Do you think you can overpower me *now*? No, Professor, you are no different from the others. I crave your blood. And what I crave—*I shall have!*"

The vampire punctuated his final statement with a swift upward movement, his hands outstretched toward Harmon. The professor narrowed his eyes and focused on the count's breast. Suddenly Dracula's face registered surprise, then mystification. With a loud groan he clutched his heart. Tottering for just a moment, the great figure of the vampire slumped downward, colliding with the edge of the casket, rolling over the lip and dropping

face up onto the floor with a rigid thump. Almost immediately, however, the fallen began to sit up. Cam threw a worried look at Harmon, but the professor's answer was a reassuring bob of his head. He had withdrawn the splinter.

"Now, my good Count, I suggest you remain where you are. I also suggest you restore your features to a more human visage. You shall not be needing your sharp teeth this night."

The Count appeared to consider Harmon's statements, then complied. In a tone of mock submission, he asked the professor if he might rise. "A standing position would be more dignified," he said wryly.

Harmon nodded. "You understand the *entire* position?"

"Perfectly, Professor Harmon. A very ingenious device which, I detect, will not operate if your heart should cease its beating or if someone should try to remove it. For the time being I am in your power. But, tell me. Do you really think you can remain powerful over me?"

Harmon merely smiled in reply. Dracula turned to the black cat which now was sitting on its haunches on top of the casket lid.

"This one you have chosen may prove to be very interesting, my sweet. But I forget myself. It has been long since I have feasted my eyes on your lovely girl-self. May I see it now?"

As Harmon and Cam watched, the cat lightly dropped to the floor. But never reached it. There was the sound of four padded feet touching the stone surface, but where there should have been a sleek-furred animal there was not.

It was the young woman who had visited Harmon in his study. Her beauty now had a new invigorating fresh-

ness. Her jet black hair and black cloak set off perfectly her milk-white oval face with its sparkling emerald eyes. *Beautiful* as a word stood meaningless in her presence.

She acknowledged Harmon and Cam with her eyes only, then spoke to the Count.

"My lord, I trust you shall not be angry with me for my choice. This world into which you awaken is populated with men of small minds, of little will, and of even less fortitude. It was not easy to find someone in a world such as this who combined the necessary qualities and resources. These men have such."

Dracula smiled. "And perhaps something else?" He did not wait for a reply to his question, the tone of which was uncertain, but merely shrugged his huge shoulders. "Never mind. I shall know everything in time. It is, however, obvious that this Harmon wishes from me something quite different from what his predecessors wished. Speak, Harmon. Say what it is you desire."

Harmon looked at the vampire steadily. "Do you not know what it is I desire?"

The Count stared back for a number of heartbeats, then his smile widened. "I know, Professor. You have done what you have done because you think that you can make me a weapon in your games."

"I do not view them as games." It was coldly said.

Dracula replied, "That is your option, Professor Harmon. But what are wars but games—even this war of yours in which you hope to enlist my strength. A war against evil. That is how you view it." A short cutting laugh. "*Evil?* Do you not know, with all your professed wisdom, that evil is something which each man defines for himself in direct relationship to what he sees as good? But, no, I shall not argue the point. If you wish to see reality in those terms, by all means do so. For the here

and now, however, what do you propose as your next move?"

"This," Harmon replied. With an expression of pain on her face Ktara caught her master as his knees buckled under him. "A necessary precaution," Harmon told the girl. "Cam—into the casket he goes. He stays there in his present condition until we get him home."

To the girl again, he said, "It will not be an easy trip back, but I've used what powers I have to make it as smooth as possible. You will do the same?"

She nodded yes. Harmon then told her what he had in mind. As they walked upward to the outside she told him that there was a lighter coffin they could use, which would be adequate for the Count and the precious soil of his native land. Cam would have to come back for it and her. First he would have to bring Harmon to Pitesti and the hostel. Harmon would make apologies for his young friend. As they reached the surface of the mountain, Harmon remarked to the girl that the moon had again slipped behind the dense of clouds. "Although the cover of darkness may be of use to you later, it will make it difficult going for us on our way down now," he said.

The girl smiled and looked upward. Moments later, the light of the moon played down into the valley.

"You see?" the professor said to Cam as they began their descent. "What is there which you cannot do, when you have allies such as this?"

Cam said nothing. He wasn't so sure—especially about that "allies" part.

CHAPTER 7

To move a coffin halfway around the world is not the easiest of tasks, especially when it is occupied. Harmon's plan, worked out in every detail prior to his arrival in Romania, was cumbersome, but his route was determined by two basic considerations. One was the likelihood of detection, a safety factor. The second was the opportunity to either pull strings or grease palms, also a safety factor.

The long trip would begin, of course, at the Arges. For Cam, Ktara and the Count it would begin tonight. They would go down the river by raft to Budesti, where the coffin would be specially crated and carried by a combination of rail and coach to Constantza on the Black Sea. From this port a small merchant vessel would carry them southward to Istanbul where they would transfer to a second vessel which would freight them to the Cretian port of Iraklion. Here a third ship—a luxury liner—would take on the crate and its two companions. They would rendezvous with Harmon at the vessel's third port of call, Palermo. He would arrive by plane.

(Bucharest-Rome-Palermo.) From that point on, ~~every-~~thing was expected to be smooth sailing, at least across the Atlantic. The final stage of transport of the vampire to the New World would be tricky. Bypassing the efficiencies of U. S. Customs, an organization with which Harmon had no influence and little inclination to attempt to bribe, would be hard.

He knew that he was asking a lot from Cam, who would be totally dependent upon the good officers of the woman. But he also knew that Cam was aware of the potential difficulties and was resourceful when his survival was threatened. He knew that Ktara recognized that should Harmon board the vessel and not find everything—and everyone—in order, her Master would have no chance to open his eyes ever again.

No, everything would be in order, of that he was confident. And once he had the vampire safe at the Westhampton house, then—

But that would be weeks from now. At the present there was very little he could do, except to enjoy the excellent cognac his friend had poured for him.

Dr. Thorka had shrugged, saying nothing by way of comment, when Harmon told him that Cam had met and become infatuated with a little tavern girl in Arefu, and that he had agreed to allow his employee a couple of days holiday. The story was weak and Harmon knew it, but he also knew that Alex, whether he believed it or not, wouldn't inquire about Cam. Something did appear to be bothering Harmon's old friend, however, and it was as he handed the professor another cognac that he came out with it. He did so in a roundabout way, moving to the window of his hostel room.

"The moon has come out of hiding again. Had you noticed, Damien?"

Harmon had indeed noticed it. As he'd told Cam, Ktara was a very helpful ally. "Yes, the light of the night has been on and off almost like an electric switch."

"An apt choice of words," Thorka replied. "But an electric switch is controlled by someone's hand, is it not?"

"Usually. Unfortunately, science, though it has learned much about weather control, has not done much in the way of controlling the light of the heavens."

"That is true, Damien. Science has not."

His last three words fell heavily. They seemed to linger in the room during the pause that followed. Harmon began to feel ill at ease. He wondered if he could change the subject by commenting on the excellence of the cognac. But he'd made that comment already.

"Your work, Alex—what is it that is engaging you now?"

"The work of an archeologist is always the same. Digging, looking, taking from the earth that which is of value."

Again the words remained. Harmon knew they were too appropriate to be mere chance.

"Something is bothering you, Alex. What is it?"

The Romanian thoughtfully rotated his cognac around the sides of his glass. Still he faced the window, looking out into the dark night.

"Damien, I do not know exactly what brought you here. I do not think I wish to know. You and I have known each other long, and I have every faith in your honesty and integrity. Thus I do not like asking what I am about to ask, and I apologize beforehand for doing so, asking also that you recognize that I find it necessary. Knowing you as I do, and also knowing how you Americans are sometimes prone to become, shall we say, *zealous* when you think you have a *mission* in terms of good and

evil—a function of your youth as a society, as I interpret it—”

“A foolish notion, evil,” Count Dracula had said.

“—in any case, I must assure myself on one point. This work you are doing, Damien, it is not in any way politically oriented, is it? In assisting you as I have done, I have not unknowingly worked against the interests of my own country—this is what I wish to be assured of.”

Were it not for the seriousness with which the question had been framed by his old friend, Harmon would have laughed. Instead he gave his word that such was not the case. Thorka seemed fully satisfied on that score.

“I did not think so, my friend, and again I apologize. International politics are something I see as the business of small men who have nothing really worthwhile at which to occupy their time.”

How had Ktara said it? “This world into which you awake is populated with men of small minds, of little will, and of even less fortitude.”

“I myself have no interest in such things,” Thorka continued, “and I did not think you would, either. Nonetheless, I felt I must ask my question and have it answered. I have done so.” Still he stood by the window, looking out. “Tell me, Damien, do you know much of the old stories of the wolves of Transylvania?”

“The wolves?”

“In our country, as you know, we have a very abundant wolf population, especially in these mountains. In the stories the peasants tell, there is one mountain upon which the wolves will not willingly go—have not done so for almost a hundred years. According to the tales, there was once a man who could call them to him against their will, who used them for purposes of his own. The purposes were various—from using them to guard his

domain to using them to fill his dinner plate. The point is that, in all the stories, the beasts were not his willing servants, they in fact avoided the mountain like the plague, even when the man—a nobleman—was said to have died. It is because the wolves have stayed away from the mountain that the local people firmly believe the nobleman's body, which the stories say was never found, still reposes somewhere up there. Do you know which mountain I refer to, Damien?"

"I assume it is the mountain upon which Castle Dracula lies in ruins."

"It is."

"Yet there are many tales and legends concerning the mountain, are there not? And the peasantry of Romania, past and present, have been prolific in their fantastic invention. They are so inventive that I dare say their equal has not yet graced the world of man and his storytellers."

Thorka nodded slowly. "I suppose there is truth in that, my old friend. But, as an archeologist, I have learned never to discount such stories out of hand. They often contain the exact arrows to show us what we seek. If more scholars believed what simple peasants had been passing on verbally for untold generations, there would, I think, be far fewer unsolved mysteries in our so-called enlightened world."

"I cannot but agree, Alex."

"Nonetheless, Damien, there are some mysteries which even an old scientist and scholar such as myself firmly believes should be left precisely as they have been—dead and buried."

Harmon thought to himself that he might return the compliment Thorka had given him earlier—*an apt choice of words*, indeed! But he had neither the inclination nor

the opportunity. Without another word, the Romanian opened the window. The sound that drifted in was unmistakable.

It was the howling of wolves. It sounded like hundreds of them, all from the direction of the mountain across the river.

"Wolves," Cam said. "They seem to be all around us."

"They are," Ktara confirmed. "But there is no cause for you to be concerned. They will not approach us—not while you remain close to your burden."

The burden, Cam reflected, had not been as heavy as he'd expected. The lighter wooden coffin had had something to do with it, of course. But almost from the first, when he'd stopped to lift the soil-and-body-filled box to his shoulders and take it up from the crypt, he'd known that it was unnaturally light. The passage upward was cramped and awkward enough without such an added bulk, but he managed it easily. When he tasted the open air, he definitely knew that it had been *too* easy. He looked to the woman for confirmation.

"Yes, I am helping. I have certain mental powers, and I did promise your employer that I would assist you."

"Your assistance is appreciated," Cam replied. As they began the downward descent to the river he was even more appreciative. Even with the full light of the moon the going was tricky. The moon. That reminded him. "Why was there no moon on the way up? It seems to me that you could have provided for us a little better than you did."

"Perhaps I could have, Mr. Sanchez. Perhaps I did not do so purposely."

"The purpose being? . . ."

"The purpose being to allow what natural obstacles

there were to your goal to remain. Removing them would have made things too easy for you."

Then Cam heard the wolves.

Ktara acknowledged that he was correct and assured him of their safety. "They can return now to this mountain. Now that *he* no longer dwells here. They knew him well, the wolves did, and he knew them."

She fell into a silence and kept her eyes on the trail. As she led the way down, Cam noticed the graceful way she moved. Her movement was a human-animal combination every woman should embody. Whatever species this Ktara belonged to, she was a seductive example of it.

"Thank you, Mr. Sanchez," the woman said quietly. He had forgotten her mind-reading capabilities. "If I might return the compliment, it is my opinion that you and Professor Harmon are superior examples of your kind as well. The words I said to my Master concerning you were sincere."

Cam thanked the woman. "And him? Your Master? What would you say of his relation to *his* kind?"

She paused, as if listening to the cries of the wolves which now came from farther up the incline. "Say of him? I have said much of him . . . you have read my words."

"That's correct. But you did not say anything at all about how you *feel* about him."

"You probably are right. Some things one does not put into words, even words of poetry. The words are not there to be used. You, for example. Could you say clearly how you feel about *your* master, the professor?"

"I'm no poet, but I could say that I like him, that I'm happy to be working for him. Those things I could say, and they're emotional things. That's what I'm trying to say, that your statements about your relationship to . . . to him . . . are *factual* statements. Words like *master*

and *slave* and *giver* and *black lord*. These don't convey anything of your emotional *feelings*, not even if you feel positively toward him or negatively."

She turned and faced Cam, stopping as she did. He could not read the look in her eyes, nor could he read the tone in her voice. "It does not matter, not really. Certainly, it should not matter to you, Mr. Sanchez."

She turned back toward the trail and said nothing until they reached the edge of the water. Not knowing what to say himself, Cam remained silent.

The river did not look wide or deep, but at this point in its length the water ran swiftly. Placing the coffin on the ground, Cam took off the back-pack which originally had been worn by the professor during their ascent. It had been filled with new contents when he had dropped his employer off at the lodgings. As he took from the pack a folded packet of rubber-like canvas about a foot-and-a-half square and about eight inches thick, he observed that Ktara was looking at the material with a skeptical eye.

"Don't worry," he said. "They've used these things to shoot rapids in water that's a lot rougher than what we're going to be facing."

"I trust you are right," she said with a wan smile. "I am not overly partial to immersion in any kind of water, rough or smooth."

In less than five minutes, the cylinder which Cam had attached to one corner of the unfolded canvas had filled the raft with gas. There was enough room for the coffin and two people to sit comfortably. For the first time since their plane had set down in this country, Cam admired the old man's advance planning. Everything had been thought of.

Almost.

The raft was two-thirds into the water and he had

just placed the coffin in its bottom, when the light flashed on behind him. It was a flashlight. Behind it stood three husky men. They wore farmers' clothes and were dirty. They looked at Cam and Ktara with strange expressions on their faces. It wasn't until two of the men exchanged comments that Cam knew what their expressions signified. Even though he couldn't comprehend their language, he could see they were under the influence of some pretty potent alcohol.

Ktara supplied an explanation.

"They think we're a wealthy couple from the city, at least two of them do. The third has just recognized the coffin for what it is and thinks we may be grave robbers. He's about to agree with the others that it would be worth their while to molest us and see what we are carrying—either to keep for themselves or to turn over to the police for a reward."

As she spoke, more views were exchanged among the three. As they nodded agreement on their plan of action, they stepped forward.

Cam was ready; his attack began at the oblique right.

The unfortunate rustic cried in pain when Cam's crescent kick connected with his throat. He went down gasping for breath that might or might not come. It was all the same to Cam who by this time had knife-bladed his right hand into the bridge of the center man's nose, breaking it with a snap that shook the man's ears. His howl was quickly joined by the cry of the third farmer who Cam had kicked in the groin.

It was over seconds after it had begun. Making sure none of the three was getting to his feet, Cam gestured toward the raft. "Get in. I'll push us off."

Ktara smiled. "Very well done, Mr. Sanchez. I doubt if I could have done better myself."

Cam felt his ears burning as he thrust off and simultaneously stepped into the raft. But why should his ego be ruffled? She had had a few centuries or so to learn whatever she knew. And she had already proven her powers in other realms. Speaking of which, he said:

"Okay. We don't need all that moonlight now. You can turn it off whenever it pleases you."

Immediately, she did.

Cam rapped on the wooden door heavily. He was sure he had the correct address. It *had* to be the right one, the one Harmon had given him. It was still dark, but he knew he didn't have that much time before he lost the valuable cover of night which had allowed him to pull into the Budesti docking area and move from there, with companion and coffin, through the cobblestone streets to the house and number that he had memorized from a street map of the town before he had left the United States. Harmon had set the whole trip up to work with clocklike precision. Each necessary individual had been contacted, paid, and keyed into his role. If, at this point where the voyage home really began, there had been a slip—if he, through some stupid mistake had misremembered the correct street number of—

At his third spurt of hammering on the door it opened. But only slightly.

"The Englishman?" asked a crackling voice from within.

"The American," Cam responded.

"You are late." The door remained as it was.

"Better late than never."

Signs and countersigns having been exchanged, the door swung open to reveal a shriveled-up toothless man who looked to be in his eighties. Gesturing with the

heavy hammer in his hand to Ktara to close the door behind her, he used the same implement to direct Cam to follow him. He led the way down a long corridor with several doors. At the end, he opened the last door on the left and held it open for Cam and the woman. Inside the room, which was dimly lighted by two kerosene lamps, was a workshop complete with benches, an abundance of tools, and a supply of various woods in plank form.

A gesture with the hammer directed where Cam should set his burden on the floor.

"So you are American?" the ancient man asked.

"That's what my passport says," Cam responded. It was true. *One* of the passports he carried was issued in the United States. The other, a Greek passport, was *forged* in the United States.

The man with the hammer nodded. "I do much work for Americans in the old days before I come to Budesti."

Noting that he appeared to be in no hurry to get about his work right now, Cam said, "I'm in a bit of a rush."

"Yes, yes. So like the Americans. Always in a rush. But why always the hurry-scurry, eh? Is it that you think the world, she is spinning around so fast that you have to hurry-scurry to keep up?" There was something about the old man that Cam didn't like. It was just a feeling.

"You tell me, now. What is it you have in this box I am to crate. It right now is a coffin, is that not so?"

"That is so. It is a coffin, but we had no other crate to use. That is why we are here, you may recall. Your job is to build us a suitable container. As for what is inside, that is our business. You have already been well paid for your services."

The man with the hammer smiled so that his gums showed fully behind his parted lips.

"I recall that very well, thank you. But I also recall that when I received the message that I was to do this work, I wondered to myself. Gheorghe, I say to myself—Gheorghe is my name—Gheorghe, why is it this person he wants to pay you all this money for a crate to be made for something that someone will bring me in a late hour of the night? I asked myself that. So now I see that what is brought to me in the late hour of the night is a box that is used for carrying the dead *in* the night. And I now ask myself something else. I ask myself, Gheorghe—"

"We know your name already. Get on with it!"

Gheorghe looked at Cam blankly. "I beg your pardons, good sir, but if I am to tell you what I say to myself, I must also tell you *how* I say to myself. Gheorghe, I say, suppose there is something illegal that is inside this box that is brought to me in the late hour of the night? Suppose it is some kind of smuggling—ha! Gheorghe is no fool! He knows that smuggling goes on all the time, and he knows that it is not legal. Then he thinks to the money he has been paid for this work he is to do, and he reflects that maybe the money was paid because of the big risk there is to himself, the risk that he takes upon himself for doing something which the police will not like and which will send him to prison for the rest of his life. So he—me—I say to myself I must see what is inside the box I am to put a crate around. So I say to you that you should open the box."

Cam had but opened his mouth when he heard Ktara's cutting voice from his side:

"Listen to me, old man. You will simply do the job you have accepted more than ample payment to do. The coffin is not to be opened. You are to understand that

fully. And you may tell your two friends that as well. Or would you rather that I tell them?"

Gheorghe screwed up his face and stared at this impudent woman with the cold voice. "What two friends?" he said warily.

"The two friends who right now are breathing heavily outside the door. The two who, unlike yourself, cannot understand English and so are waiting for you to give the signal to enter and subdue your guests. The two who, like yourself, will end up as dead men unless you call them in here very cordially to meet your guests, telling them that you have inspected the coffin and that there is nothing of value within it."

Cam glanced from the closed door to Ktara. "He was going to hold us up?"

"If necessary. He thought it probably would be. He was going to kill us with the hammer. The others would attack us with the very long knives they carry."

Gheorghe's eyes were wide with wonder. "How—how do you know this?"

"Call them as I instructed you," she said icily.

"I—"

He got out that one word; then his eyes widened even farther if that were possible. Cam saw the flare of Ktara's eyes, into which the carpenter had been looking. And then Gheorghe's eyes seemed to close. It was in a trance-like voice that he spoke. One or two sentences in a foreign language.

The door opened and the two men—well-built laborers, by the look of them—entered. They too looked at Ktara, at first curiously, then with the same blank stare that characterized the carpenter. Their hands hung limply by their sides, their feet were rooted to the floor. Their positions seemed to satisfy Ktara.

“Now, old man, you will do the work you were paid to do. *Now!*”

As Gheorghe did so, Cam caught Ktara’s eye. He winked. She had more than fulfilled her boast. She had more than matched his quickness and his efficiency.

CHAPTER 8

It was another dark night, less than three weeks later. His wheel chair resting on the sand facing out onto the water, Harmon was not sure whether the darkness was natural or whether the black-cloaked woman who stood at his side had anything to do with it. He did not ask and she on her part volunteered little.

She was a mystery woman, this Ktara, and Harmon believed she would always remain so. On their passage across the ocean, she had communicated very little, preferring to remain in her cabin for most of the daylight hours as well as those of the night. Not only did her voice say little, her face said even less. Its expressions only rarely betrayed an emotion or thought. Harmon had wondered just what those thoughts could be, wondered if the youthful body that now enclosed her, colored the mind which was filled with memories from the beginning of what man knew of civilization. On the rare occasions when they had talked briefly, he had been tempted to inquire of her something of her former experiences,

but with the span of ages she had witnessed where did one begin? It was too much even for a man such as Harmon to contemplate. And he was sure that any such question would receive very short shrift. He was to her nothing more than a useful tool. By bringing her Master into this world, he had given her an extended lease on life. The thought had occurred to him now and again that, should she feel the tool no longer served a purpose useful to her, she might choose to rid herself of what could be considered excess baggage. That she had the power to do so, Harmon had no doubt.

Neither for that matter did Cam who, during their crossing, had told him much about the Ktara.

From the very start of their travels she had demonstrated her strength. Her assistance in carrying the coffin down the mountain side and her handling of the three men in Budesti were two examples of her power. Then, in Istanbul when the captain of their ship insisted on knowing what was in the crate they had brought on board—countermanding the orders from his superior who had been well bribed—the top of the crate simply would not yield and the heavy screwdriver he was using as a prying tool snapped in mid-shaft. He was about to call for a stronger crowbar, when a look in his face told Cam his attention had been diverted elsewhere. Excusing himself, he rushed from the hold, a wet stain on his trouser legs explaining his difficulty. When Cam expressed to Ktara that he thought the captain would be back at the crate during the trip south, the woman only smiled. “He will find himself in similar straits each and every time he nears his goal.”

Harmon had chuckled when Cam had told him that. Her efficient handling of other “little” problems that cropped up before Palermo increased his respect for her

power. Especially her telekinetic ability. True, he had known she possessed it—the bookshelves that had been wrenched from his study wall had been evidence enough of that—and, true, he had thought long about the implications of his using a weaker version of the same power as his first line of defense against her Master. But he had known there would be risk involved in the whole scheme. Perhaps he never thought they would get as far as they had. But they had. What happened next would depend on several variables, and Ktara was one of them. If for any reason she decided it was not in her interest to have Harmon control the Count through his relay mechanism, she could countermand it. Not by manipulating any part of either mechanism itself; any interference of that kind would send the sliver automatically plunging into the vampire's heart. But there was one thing she could do: She could use a counter force to prevent Harmon's tripping the lever within him. That she had the power, there was no doubt. In the final analysis, if it came to a power struggle the whole scheme hinged only upon her whim.

An unsettling situation, to be sure. The thought of it was unsettling, especially now when at this very moment, if all had gone well, the object of his overseas quest was near.

He decided to try and learn where she stood, other than her present position on the sand.

"You are satisfied with the house and your accommodations?"

"My needs are few, Professor Harmon."

"And those of your Master? Are they few as well?"

She did not look at him, but kept her eyes trained seaward. It soon became clear that she was not going to answer his question. He tried again.

"One of his needs, it is obvious, is yourself."

"I serve him with my powers, yes."

"And they are powers different from his, aren't they?"

Now she did look at him. "You are a clever man, Professor Harmon. Speak what you know."

"Your ability to read thoughts. He does not have it. I should have known that from the very first, when he first spoke to us. *I am told you speak English*, he said. You can communicate to him with your mind, and probably he can communicate to you as well that way. But only you can read the minds of others."

"And you see this as an advantage? An advantage to yourself?"

"True. Perhaps I have more trust in your good will than in his. Am I wrong to place trust in you?"

There it was—the central question. Her answer:

"Trust in anyone else's good will is not intelligent."

Harmon did not respond immediately. "You know why I am questioning you. I am worried—"

"Professor Harmon, you have every reason to worry. You have every reason to fear for your life and the lives of many people. You knew the risks you were taking when you had the stake pulled from my Master's heart. One who knows the risks and decides to gamble cannot ask to be assured that he will not lose."

"As you lost?"

He'd said the three words softly. Again her eyes turned from him and looked out into the black water. Harmon continued.

"It was out there once, wasn't it? The place it all started—for us as well as for you. *The first land I remember well*, so goes the line you wrote. What was it like, Ktara? What was the first land like?"

Her lips hardly moved as her eyes seemed to envision the place of which she spoke.

"It was . . . it was *my* first place and . . . yours, in the way you meant it. A place where the extent of man's knowledge was far beyond what has since been relearned. And a beautiful place where one could enjoy all the pleasures of nature and. . ."

"And what? Tamper with its workings? Is that what happened to you—and to—"

She whirled upon him, her nostrils flaring. "*Tamper?* You say that word to *me*? When you, in what you consider to be your wisdom—"

"I admit it," Harmon interrupted. "I admit to tampering. I admit to gambling when I know the risks involved, as you yourself have said. But you, did *you* know the risks involved—back then, when *you* gambled?"

When she turned from him once more, he pressed on.

"Even today the legend of Atlantis, if that was in fact the first land's name, has come down to us. Some call it Eden, others by other names, but the story is consistent. Human knowledge became *too* advanced and the result was that the Garden World was taken away from man-land. Some stories say man destroyed it himself by accident, others say he was banished."

Ktara nodded slowly. "It amounts to the same thing. . . ."

"The Old Gods."

"*All life on that past continent, Whose time the Old Gods cried was spent.*"

Harmon said quietly, "Not all life. *My Master and his cat-slave fled.* Why, Ktara? Why was it that, of all life on that continent, only you and he—"

She cut him off.

"The launch. It approaches. It is off course."

Harmon had seen and heard nothing from the sea except the quiet and steady lapping of waves. But knowing the woman's sensory abilities to be superior to his, he flicked on his flashlight and swept his beam in an arc which would serve as a guide for the vessel. It was a small craft, but very sea-worthy. Harmon had purchased it prior to their leaving for Europe. By ship's cable he had arranged for the boat, and its temporary captain, to rendezvous with the liner that had carried them since Palermo. At rendezvous point, Cam and a plastic-sealed crate were waiting in the water. A tricky arrangement, but one which avoided the passing of the Count's coffin through U.S. Customs. There would be a problem for Immigration. They would have to deal with a missing passenger holding a Greek passport, but that confusion would not affect this place on the Westhampton shoreline. If all had gone well, Cam would be piloting the craft as it entered the Westhampton inlet, having dropped off the other pilot at a dock further to the east. The other man was an old sea captain Harmon had known for several years and who had agreed to help for the sake of friendship, adventure and money, after having been assured that the professor's illegal import package contained items merely "of scientific interest."

Now Harmon could hear the throb of the launch's engines, and shortly afterward he saw the vessel itself as it homed in on his flashlight beam. It was a matter of minutes before the engines were cut and, the launch securely anchored, Cam was wading to shore with his floating crate. All had gone well.

To this point.

The Westhampton Manor was a tribute to the manner in which the wealthy of Long Island lived in a former

generation. Situated on ten acres of prime sea-fronting real estate, the complex, in addition to the main house, included a guest cottage in which were ample servants quarters and a garage for four automobiles. In addition, there was a stable which could accommodate six horses, and a gardener's cottage that included a glass-enclosed greenhouse that had been re-glassed during the last month.

The main house itself had undergone tremendous restoration during the same time. Having been constructed in days when builders did not skimp on quality materials, the three-story structure was sound. But every one of the thirty-five rooms of the interior had needed some work, ranging from complete reflooring to simple plastering and painting. Plumbing and wiring had needed work too. The bill for the job had been monumental, but Cam, seeing the completed work for the first time, was impressed and thought that what had been done was worth the cost. However, even with the freshness of new paint and paneling, the house seemed gloomy. Perhaps it was the time of night, or perhaps it was the way the tall pines that surrounded the manor seemed to interlace their branches. They seemed to repel the world beyond. Most probably what made him uneasy was what Cam knew would be resting this night in the great stone basement under the house, just as soon as he divested himself of the large crate he now carried through the main foyer.

As Harmon opened the door to the stairs leading downward, Cam noted the three empty packing crates standing off to one side.

"Everything arrive in good shape?" he asked.

The professor shot a look at Ktara, then back at Cam. "We have to talk about that later," he said.

Cam shrugged and moved through the doorway and began his descent.

There had been an attempt on the part of the restoration men Harmon had hired to brighten up the dark basement. They had installed bright fluorescent lighting and new laboratory benches and work shelves, but there was a damp dankness about these underground quarters that no amount of work would ever change. Even the electronic equipment scattered on benches and shelves—far from giving its surroundings a bright modern look—seemed instead to take on a grotesque cast of the primeval. The total effect looked like the laboratory of some Grade D motion picture mad scientist. It was, to Cam, the most comfortless part of a comfortless house.

Ktara had followed him down the stairs. As they reached the center of the great room and Cam lowered the casket to the stone floor, there was a soft whirring sound behind him. As he turned, he smiled to see the sliding panel from behind which Harmon wheeled his chair into the room. The special elevator went from the basement to all floors, and Cam was rather proud of the achievement. The design and specifications had been his own, and he was glad to find that, at least from what he could see at present, they had been followed exactly. Later he would have to inspect the device more thoroughly. For the present, however—

“My Master must feed,” Ktara said. “You will awaken him now?”

Cam shot a look at Harmon. “Why now? He’s not deteriorating. There’s no need to awaken him until—”

Ktara cut him off. “Until you have a use for him?” She turned back to Harmon. “I ask you to awaken my Master. I ask that he be allowed nourishment.”

Ignoring Cam’s red face, Harmon nodded and wheeled to one of the wall shelves, where he detached one of several glass bottles from where it had been hooked up to

a heating element. Capping the bottle and resting it in his lap, he wheeled back to the casket.

Cam's reaction to the rich red color of the fluid within the bottle was one of disgust. It looked much too close to the real thing.

They were to learn shortly that he for whom the fluid was intended also did not think much of it.

Gheorghe, the Budesti carpenter, had done a very craftsmanlike job on the outer crate. Cam had appreciated his professional work as he watched it being accomplished, but he had not realized just how professional until now, when he applied crowbar and muscle to the top of the crate. This effort, after his earlier exertions in the night, nearly exhausted him. In any event, it took him more than fifteen minutes to free the lid from the crate. With a final effort he lifted the coffin from its interior. As he felt its weight, the thought flashed through his mind that Ktara could be helping him if she wanted to—that in fact she could have assisted him in uncrating the coffin. He was about to put his thought to words, but decided against it. He was sure he knew what her response would be.

It would have made things too easy.

He set the coffin on the stone floor and lifted its lid. He had no real desire to look at the one who lay within, but somehow his eyes could not help themselves. The Count lay in repose, much the same as his body had been that first time Cam had seen him. That had been halfway around the world, in a place which suggested by its very aura that things such as this could be. But this—this was New York, a place where—

And it was now, looking down at the open coffin, that the real weight of the thing they had done crashed upon

Cameron Sanchez's brain. *What in God's name had they done?*

The vampire's eyelids flicked open.

Cam's involuntary reactions moved him back two paces. He flashed a look at Harmon, then he understood. Of course. Harmon had removed the sliver.

Ktara spoke softly. "Professor Harmon has something with which to nourish you, Master."

It was perhaps a trick of the eye, but Cam felt sure that the fluorescent lights flickered as the vampire grasped the coffin edge and arranged himself in a sitting position. Cam suddenly imagined he could hear the surf outside the house, surf pounding the beaches. But that was impossible. The weather might suddenly act up, but here, under the house this far back from the shoreline, such a change should not register. Tricks were being played on his mind.

But the look on the vampire's face was not trick of mind. It was self-satisfaction combined with pure evil. The look of the Devil laughing as he surveyed the poor souls he had gathered to himself within his kingdom. Even his words filled Cam with an uncomfortable feeling that he was a helpless servant.

"The end of our journey, I take it."

Professor Harmon acknowledged the fact. "You are in my house. It is located on the southern shore of Long Island, which is situated—"

"Enough!" Dracula said with a voice of venom. "Ktara has related to me where I am with respect to the world as I know it." His eyes narrowed at the woman. "You said something of nourishment."

"Cam," Harmon said, extending the bottle.

Cam was not eager to touch the thing, but he could not expect his employer to wheel himself over to the

coffin and strain to reach the vampire's hand. He took the bottle from Harmon, grasping it only with his first two fingers and thumb, not allowing it to touch the palm of his hand. Silly and stupid, he told himself, but nonetheless that is how the bottle was held as he extended it to the Count. As the vampire lifted the bottle to his lips, Cam turned his eyes from both.

He yanked them back as the bottle crashed against the far wall.

"*What is this?*" Dracula demanded, his voice echoing from the stone.

"A synthetic," Harmon replied. "You cannot expect us to feed you with whole blood. It has been chemically compounded to be as close as possible to the real—"

Dracula's leer cut him off. "There are *other* possibilities, Professor."

"Not that I see, Count Dracula. You have two choices, and only two. Either you subsist on the synthetic—or you go without. Obviously the choice is yours, but I will not tolerate your destroying the supply we have manufactured."

"*You* will not tolerate! Harmon, you are indeed a madman!"

"And you, Count—you are hungry," Harmon said simply.

The vampire's lips began to curl back. But the movement halted. When they had returned to their relaxed position, the Count spoke levelly.

"You are correct, Professor. I am both hungry and weak. I shall therefore accept the repast you have prepared. But I warn you, Harmon—I warn you solemnly—that should that little device you have implanted falter, just once, it will be real human blood that I shall drink. Yours."

The smile on Harmon's face looked a little strained. "There are other defenses against such as you, Count."

Dracula laughed. "Are there? Yes, I suppose there are, but among the volumes of writing that you no doubt have devoured regarding 'such as I' there are a great many misconceptions. I would not count too heavily on your defenses, Professor. The result of your using them could serve *my* purposes rather than yours. Now you will allow me to dine?"

It was almost dawn as Cam served Harmon a hasty breakfast of bacon, eggs and coffee. The Count was unconscious, Ktara was somewhere about the house. It was the first opportunity Cam had had to speak to his employer in private.

"You look tired, Professor. Or is it more worry than fatigue?"

Harmon sipped at his coffee, found it too hot, and placed the cup back onto the saucer.

"I have a special cause for concern, Cam. By my accounting, the cell which energizes the implant switching device must be recharged soon. Within two weeks. If it is not—"

"But you ordered the necessary equipment. I saw the crates in the hallway."

"You did, but as I unpacked the contents I found that we are one crate short. Unfortunately, it contains—"

Cam cut him off. "Did you try to have it traced?"

"I have no need to trace it. It appears that work has been accomplished already. Among the letters I found in our mailbox upon my arrival was this one." From his smoking jacket Harmon produced an envelope. He handed it to Cam who extracted a single sheet of white paper from its covering. The letterhead simply said FREIGHT

RECOVERY INC. There was no address, no telephone number, simply the name of the firm. Underneath, the undated letter form was brief and to the point.

Sometime in the future you may wish to avail yourself of the unique services of our firm. Our specialty is locating things which may have become misrouted or lost in transport. Our fee, which is based on the value of the shipment concerned, is a reasonable fraction of that value. Our methods, because of their unique facets, must remain known to none but ourselves, but we are able to guarantee swift and effective action for any job we accept. If you have something missing, contact us through the mailing station given below, using the handy return blank at the bottom of this letter. Thank you.

Under the unsigned body of the letter was a dotted line, beneath which was a form which read as follows:

To: FREIGHT RECOVERY INC., _____.
Yes, I am interested in availing myself of your services. My consignment designation is _____.
I have signed this form and hope to hear from you soon with regard to my consignment and your fee.

In the two blanks were hand-printed, first, a West Side Manhattan post office box number and, second, the "designation," DH 977.

Cam looked up from the letter to Harmon. "Your initials plus the Westhampton zip code."

Harmon nodded. "What do you make of it?"

"Sounds like somebody's got your crate and now wants to sell it back to you. A hijack operation combined with kidnapping. Or maybe *package-napping* would be a better word."

"My opinion is the same, although I don't care about the terminology. What I care about is getting that crate. Fast. If we don't—"

Harmon left the sentence uncompleted. As far as Cam was concerned, there was no need to finish it. He had the message.

Or, rather, he had most of it. Harmon had not told him the worst. He knew that Ktara's loyalties were questionable and knew that she had difficulty reading his mind, a difficulty she would not experience with Cam's. Therefore, while he had communicated the urgency of the matter to his associate, he had not been completely truthful. They did not have a couple of weeks. They in fact had—at the outside—no more than days. Four of them.

CHAPTER 9

Much as Harmon despised the telephone because it permitted uninvited interruption, he had several of the devices installed in the Long Island house. All of them on special hookup jacks that insured they stayed disconnected and silent until *he* wished to make a call. The original purpose was to arm himself and Cam with an additional means of communication should the special equipment he had just about completed become unservicable. This morning, however, he was glad enough that what he termed the "devil's jabber-machine" was available to him.

Sanford Proctor was Harmon's contemporary. They had known each other since the year they both joined the New York City police and had kept in contact on and off through the intervening years. Also in official retirement, Proctor, for many years in his police career, had been involved in special assignment work which he had always been evasive about. Harmon suspected that he still was engaged in work of the same kind, but never pressed the question. Now and then, however, whenever Harmon

needed either information or some small favor involving the city government, Proctor had been able to be of effective assistance.

It was not so much assistance as information that he was seeking this morning, however. And Proctor's knowledge was sufficient to the task.

"It sounds familiar, Damien. The pattern works pretty much as you've surmised. At the airports or shipping terminals, a package gets detoured and moved out of the main channel. Then it's warehoused somewhere while the jackers contact the person to whom the shipment is addressed, claiming they can locate his missing goods for him. It's a fairly successful racket, and it's worked at freight terminals in most of the big cities. We've just got more of them here, that's all. The city has been able to crack a number of the operations, but always there are others waiting to fill the gap."

"This particular outfit, Sandy—this Freight Recovery Inc.—is it one you've heard of?"

"As Shakespeare once put it, what's in a name? I wouldn't be surprised if it's one that has occurred to several practitioners of the trade. After all, there's no confusion in the minds of consumers—these outfits don't advertise their services. But if you let me have that letter, maybe I can have someone take a look into things."

Harmon considered. "No, Sandy, that would take time, and time is something I don't have a great quantity of right now. Thanks for your offer, though. I think I'd better deal with the company personally."

"You're—ah—not thinking of paying a ransom, are you, Damien?"

"I didn't say that, no."

A gritty chuckle came over the wire. "No, you didn't *say* that and I suspect you didn't *think* that either. You

realize that to deal with this company in any other way could prove to be somewhat dangerous."

"I suppose it could," Harmon replied. Just as he was only dimly aware of Proctor's real activities, he was not sure how much Proctor knew about his own. He suspected, however, that his old crony had at least a couple of thoughts about some of the things he and Cam had been involved in.

"Well, Damien, I would guess that after all these years you know your limitations. But if you should run into any trouble, let me know. I'd be only too happy to give you a hand."

Harmon thanked his friend and replaced the receiver. He had stared at it for some thirty seconds before he realized that Cam had spoken to him.

"I said, what now?" Cam repeated.

"The obvious," Harmon said. "You are going to hand-deliver a letter. Ask Ktara if I may have a moment of her time. I'd like her to accompany you."

Three hours later a tall thin man entered the main doorway of the West Eighty-third Street post office. He looked to be in his late thirties or early forties, but other than his height and slenderness there was not much outstanding that one could notice about him. It was as if he had chosen the gray suit and hat he wore very carefully. While it was not sadly out of date, it was not at all in fashion. It was a plain suit that could be described only as gray and, perhaps, neat. The hat, too, was neither wide nor narrow-brimmed. Bland. Bland was also a good description of the man's features which, like his clothing, would hardly register on any but the most interested eye, and would immediately be forgotten by all but the most retentive mind.

It was the combination of these natural and acquired characteristics which made Marty Gavin an excellent choice for the job his employers paid him to do.

Entering the building, he paused and lit a cigarette, his eyes scanning the interior in a seemingly careless manner as he blew out his match and carefully placed it into the sand a metal ashtray at the side of the door provided. Satisfied that nobody was watching him—in fact there was nobody out on the floor *to* watch—he walked briskly to the wall of personal mail boxes. With a deft wrist movement he turned the small knob to the desired combination and reached his hand inside. The hand brought out four envelopes which the thin man leisurely inserted in the inside pocket of his gray suit jacket. Closing the box and turning, he almost stepped on the large black cat that lay almost at his feet.

His first reaction was one of surprise. Then his startled expression turned to one of cruelty. He drew back his right shoe with more than half a notion to kick the animal out of his way. But the half-notion vanished in an instant. The cat turned its head toward him, and there was something in the way the feline eyes *looked* at him.

Cursing the authorities for not keeping stray animals out of public places, Marty Gavin moved to the door at a pace that was quicker than usual.

Across the street in an illegally parked station wagon, Cam Sanchez watched Marty Gavin depart. He took no particular interest in the man until he noticed that a black cat had followed him from the building. The animal did not, however, follow the man's progress to the east, but crossed the street and leaped into the rear seat of the station wagon, Cam having opened the traffic-side door to allow it to do so.

"He's clutching a subway token," said the woman in

black who reopened the door and stepped out of the wagon.

"And heading east. That means he's probably headed for the Eighth Avenue line on Eighty-first. Okay, I'll meet you both there, at the park subway entrance. Anything else?"

Ktara shook her head. "Mr. Marty Gavin has a one-track mind. Get the subway and meet Vincent."

"Okay. I'll see you soon." He turned the ignition key.

"You could walk as well," she said. "It might prove to be easier."

Cam frowned. "Not if your one-track mind decides to shift tracks and suddenly grabs a cab. Like I said, soon."

As the engine flexed its muscles and sent the wagon shooting west, Cam quickly sorted out his best route. New York City streets in this area were for the most part one-way. His quarry was headed east on Eighty-third, fine for a pedestrian, but not for a car. His best bet was north on Amsterdam one block to Eighty-fourth, then east one block to Columbus Avenue where another right turn to the south would take him the three blocks to Eighty-first. Then another turn eastward would take him the one block to the subway entrance located between Central Park and Planetarium Park.

Turn—right and hard, green light saying all is okay with the law, screaming rubber saying all not okay with the tires which had the right to complain. Then one block to the north and—and a wagon-rocking halt behind the compact ahead. Red light. Now green, and Cam's fist on the horn urging the driver of the compact—a woman who suddenly had an urge to locate something in her outsized purse—to some kind of action, preferably for-

ward. Scowling back at him through the rear window, she obliged, but took her sweet time about it.

Through the light, turn the corner, still behind the snail-paced compact which somehow could not decide whether the right or left side of the street was best for it and therefore compromised on dead center. Again the horn. Again the scowling face leering back at him, but —this time her car was moving and as she turned her head to the right, her hands on the wheel compensated by shifting to the left. Cam floored the accelerator.

He shot by the woman as though she had been standing still. His foot stayed where it was as he reached the corner and the red light which had just announced itself. Another hard turn to the right. Now on Columbus and heading south, he shifted over into the left lane, his eyes peering ahead on both sides of the sidewalk to spot the man and woman he supposedly was following.

Negative, but it was too much to ask for to see them until he had reached at least Eighty-third. The green light allowed him to cross legally. He sped on, scanning the sidewalks even more carefully. If Marty Gavin was heading for the Eighty-first Street subway, his normal route would be west on Eighty-third, south for two blocks on Columbus, then west again for one block on Eighty-first. Between Eighty-third and Eighty-second Cam saw nothing. Stopped by the red light which suddenly appeared, Cam trained his eyes on the one-block stretch of Columbus Avenue before him. Negative again.

They had to be ahead of him!

The green light allowed him to move across the now empty intersection and Cam's right foot assured he would make the next corner in record time. But as he started to yank the wheel to the left in order to execute the move, the yellow light again turned to red. Cursing, Cam

sent the wagon through the turn anyway, first obeying that one part of the law which says one is to look both ways first before endangering other motorists and defenseless pedestrians. Now he could not search the sidewalks as his attention concentrated on keeping at least two of the station wagon's wheels on the pavement, as he slipped into and beyond the two-way traffic that this part of Eighty-first allowed city drivers. As he whipped the wagon into line, he clearly saw two things dead ahead on the right.

One was the pair he was following. Up ahead at the corner they both were entering the hole in the pavement which led to where one caught the southbound train. The second thing was that there was no parking place anywhere on the block before Planetarium Park.

In less than a split second he made his decision. He yanked the wheel hard to the right and up over the sidewalk onto the cobblestone drive that curved in front of the Planetarium entrance. Passing the small parking lot he ripped around almost to the park exit, then switched off the motor. He yanked down the left sun visor that from the outside windshield now revealed a real-looking OFFICIAL BUSINESS placard (it didn't say official *what*, however), then he slammed the door and bolted across the grass for the sidewalk and the subway entrance.

He realized as his feet hit the stone steps that he had neither token nor the necessary change. Reaching the train level, he realized something else.

One, there was a line at the token booth.

Two, a southbound train had just pulled in. People were getting on.

He took the turnstile at a jump, only slightly aware that voices were shouting behind him. Almost miraculously, doors closed as soon as his forward thrust had

brought him inside the car. The train moved. So did Cam.

The car he had entered contained about a dozen people, but not the two he was looking for. He headed forward but before he'd reached the door, something nagging at the back of his mind told him his direction was wrong. He reversed and two cars to the rear, found his quarry.

"There was no need for the athletic display," Ktara said with a smirk. "I could have held the train as long as you required."

Cam frowned. "If you're so great at holding things, you might have slowed down your man's walking pace, some. You both looked like contenders in the Kentucky Derby!"

He was about to rephrase his analogy, thinking that she probably hadn't gotten it. She not only had, she went him one better. "But then you wouldn't have had the chance to play Indianapolis, would you?"

His frown lessened. "All right, what's our next move? Where's he going?"

"Seven stops, total. To Fourteenth Street. That is where he meets Vincent."

"Vincent who?"

"Just Vincent so far. When I meet Vincent, I'll let you know the rest. I have my limitations too, you know."

"I thought you'd never got around to admitting it."

He had said it in jest but somehow she did not seem to take it that way. Her eyes flashed with a sudden haughtiness that her tone matched.

"Mr. Sanchez, I do not doubt that you have your way with most women you meet. Please keep your boyish charm to yourself when I am with you. I am not flattered

by it. In fact, it quite repulses me. You could learn a lesson or two about manners from your employer."

Cam's eyebrows arched. He realized mid-thought that *she* could realize his thought! And she had.

"You can erase that notion from your brain as well. There are things regarding Damien Harmon that interest me. I would know more of this man before"—she paused (for dramatic effect? for the right words? Cam wondered about it several times subsequently)—"before his end. As for you, you do not even *amuse* me. Perhaps my having referred to you as an uncommon man may have misled you. If so, be misled no longer. I am and shall remain completely neutral with regard to you. I trust you will use what intelligence you have to keep me that way."

She had made her point. Cam told her so. Extending the open-handed sign of peace, he asked for a truce.

"*Truce* exactly describes our situation, Mr. Sanchez."

Cam nodded. "An interruption in the state of war. I'm curious about one thing. When does the truce end?"

She looked at him steadily. There was no malice in her voice, only a touch of sadness.

"That . . . is not mine to say. But the truce *will* end, that much is certain. And when it does. . ."

It was another of those sentences that needed no ending.

Marty Gavin got off the train at Fourteenth, walked briskly to an underground magazine stand and spoke briefly to a short plump man standing nearby. The man was Vincent Porro, Ktara said, and he had been worried until he saw Gavin approaching. ("He wasn't sure whether today was the day for System Three or System Four,"

Ktara explained. "It's different meeting places for different days. He's not very bright, it appears.")

The letters changed hands and Marty Gavin headed back to take an uptown train. Vincent Porro nervously made his way through the passageways to the station where he could catch the train to Brooklyn. He took it. Cam and Ktara did not; there was no need. The shaky Vincent Porro had rehearsed in his mind every future step of the way, complete with the address of the Brooklyn warehouse which was his final destination.

"There he hands the letters over to someone named Ernie. We could check to be sure if you like."

Cam said no. They'd better get back to the wagon and then back to Westhampton. The professor would be waiting for their report.

He was. He was pleased with what they'd learned.

"We know that section of Brooklyn well, don't we, Cam?"

They did. It was the scene of one of the bloodiest gang wars in New York's recent crime history. In the middle of all the gunfire, no one had noticed that one of the "soldiers" pulling a trigger was a very large Puerto Rican. The professor had not totally approved of this action, but then he had not totally disapproved either.

"So we go to the mattresses again?" Cam asked.

"Not quite," Harmon said.

"The police?" This had been their usual *modus operandi*. Unearth the facts, then let the police know anonymously.

But Harmon shook his head.

"No, much too slow. Not that the police couldn't handle our friends at Freight Recovery Inc., but there would be all those forms to fill out and the usual bureaucratic red tape to go through before we recovered our

equipment. No, I think we cannot afford the police this time."

Harmon cast a semi-questioning glance at Ktara. She smiled.

"Yes, Professor. My Master's hunger is not satisfied with your synthetic compound."

Cam understood, but looked to Harmon for confirmation. He got it.

"Why should we not use the most formidable weapon we have? It will give us the chance to see how he weathers his first test. As for the members of the firm—they have brought it upon themselves."

CHAPTER 10

The flames in the huge fireplace in the first-floor study crackled and hissed from the pine logs they consumed. Close by the stone hearth the air in the room was hot and bright, but further from the bountiful semicircle, the dark and cold was not quite dispelled. Even the comforting sounds of the blaze itself were negated as the antique clock resting on the mantle over the hearth announced that the time was 8:30. Its tones seemed to herald the sad last moment of the world's existence.

The light played strange with the face of Count Dracula as he toyed with, but did not drink from, the crystal wine goblet Cam had given him once they were all seated. It was he who sat furthest from the flames, as if he feared them. Perhaps he did, but he did not show it in his features or in his manner of speech, which was thoughtful and slow.

"It is an interesting proposition you make to me. Most interesting. Your scale of values I find quite intriguing. Human blood I shall *not* have—that is what you said to

me only hours ago. Now it appears that there are degrees of sanctity with regard to human blood. These men you speak of. Because they are criminals—by your accounting, at least—you would loose upon them such a one as myself. With no concern about their humanity, with no concern for their lives or blood, you would have me destroy them. Because they are criminals and have broken your law.”

Harmon’s voice was steady. “They are criminals, yes. They also have something of mine.”

The vampire smiled. “And that is the law which they have broken—the important law which states that *your* possessions are not to be violated. You see, Professor Harmon, I understand quite well your frame of reference and your frame of mind. And yet you would argue with me on that which I said that first night we spoke together. Evil is a very personal thing, is it not? And does it not contain several degrees of being? Am I not a lesser evil than these men—at this moment, because I can do you some good if I will?”

The vampire did not wait for a response. “But I do not care about your private system of morality. I shall accept this role you have designed for me—for this one occasion. As my sweet Ktara has told you, I hunger.”

His statement was off-hand, as if he were a gentleman merely announcing his need for food to a genial host. Yet Harmon and Cam both had seen that other face he could produce at will. And there was, in Harmon’s mind, one serious doubt.

“If you are allowed to—er, have your way with one or two of these men, there is the bothersome question of—”

Dracula lifted his hand. “Your thought transmits clearly, without benefit of special reading powers such as those

of my Ktara. You are concerned that my victims become as myself. You need not be concerned. As I have mentioned to you, many of the stories about me are not based upon fact. Legend has its usefulness upon occasion, but—”

“Then the victims of vampires do not themselves become vampires?”

The Count paused. “Firstly, your continued use of the word *vampire* is not entirely accurate, but such I have been called for centuries—*vampire* or its equivalents—so I shall not dispute your use of the term if it makes my classification easier for you. As to your specific question, let me say that the bite of one such as myself does not grant the victim immortality. Unless, of course, I wish it to do so. It takes a conscious act on my part and I am most selective as to whom I grant this boon.”

“I would not call it a boon,” Harmon said.

Dracula lowered his head in a slight mock-bow. “That, of course, is your option. You may be confident, however, that those who fall victim to me on this excursion will be totally dead. You have my pledged word on that.”

“Is your pledged word something I should accept?” Harmon asked.

“You shall have to,” came the response. “Now, then, are there any further restrictions you wish to place upon me?”

“There are.”

A genial smile. “Of course.”

Cam Sanchez glanced at his watch. Twelve-forty-five. He had parked the black Cadillac around the far corner of the warehouse which continued to show a light from the one window facing the street. As his eyes moved from the watch-dial back to the building, he shot a glance skyward. There was nothing, of course. Even had what he

looked for been there, the night was too dark to reveal it. He would know when it arrived.

He'd known exactly when it left. The green translucent glass that fronted the unit he had installed in the car earlier this afternoon had shown the movement begin. It was a small white blip on the screen and had started less than fifteen minutes previously. Causing the blip was a smaller transmitter implant attached to a unit that could receive and transmit verbal communication. This, too, was in frequency with a unit Cam had with him—not installed in the vehicle, however, but a portable device about the size of a half-dollar. Both frequencies—that of the movement tracer and the communicator—were monitored also by the master units in the basement of the Westhampton manor. It was an ingenious set-up, Cam thought to himself, one which even the Count had to admit was ingenious. Not that he had expressed any appreciation for twentieth-century electronics—in fact, he appeared to view it all as being rather rudimentary. No, it was the system he admitted to admiring.

"All so well thought out, Harmon. Should I veer from my course, or should I attack your young assistant, you would know about it immediately. I, in turn, would find my heart again pierced. A very effective deterrent."

Harmon had nodded. "There is another deterrent you also should be aware of."

"Which is?"

"The precious earth in your resting place. It could be dumped into the sea should anything . . . untoward . . . occur."

Dracula smiled. "The threat gives me pause, Professor. As you may know, that soil has been with me for some time—"

"For such a long time that there is no more of its kind

remaining on the surface of the world," Harmon interrupted.

"I would therefore not wish to see it dispersed," the Count continued. "But I do not fear your doing so. Not while my Ktara remains near enough to tear your mind to fragments. She has every reason to fear your 'deterrent' as much as I."

"There is, then, one last guarantee I have," Harmon said. "Your pledged word that you will follow my instructions until my property is restored to me."

"Is my pledged word a guarantee you now find acceptable?"

"As you yourself said, I shall have to."

Again the Count favored Harmon with a short condescending bow.

That had been at eleven-fifteen. It was now twelve-thirty. Cam checked the green glass monitor. The white blips were getting closer.

Upward and to the east, the great black bat was zeroing in on target.

The little plump man who was Vincent Porro opened the door to the side alley just a crack and peered out nervously. One thing he was nervous about was the full house he had back on the table. Jacks and eights, the first really good hand he'd had all night. Maybe he'd bet the hand wrong, maybe the others knew—really knew—he had something good. Maybe that's why they sent him into the office to check the side door. *He* hadn't heard any noise. Maybe what they were going to do was change his cards. If they did that, well—

He wouldn't do anything, except maybe get red in the face and sweat and stammer. He wouldn't even *say* anything, and he knew it. It wasn't fair! He'd been with the

organization a lot longer than some of these punks, and he'd done his work well, too—the work the higher-ups let him do, which wasn't much. Always "Vincent, run do this" or "Vincent, you go pick up that" or, like now, "Vincent, go check the alley door." And then that fat slob Ernie sliding his pistol across the table, knowing that he himself didn't carry one, and telling him to be careful that he didn't shoot a shadow or his own leg.

He couldn't help it. Guns made him nervous. Vincent Porro sighed. Just about everything made him nervous. Like when some punk came by the place and Vincent couldn't tell if he was one of the "big guys" or not, because the way the organization was now set up only Ernie knew who the contact man on the next level was, and so Vincent had to treat everybody with respect only to find out later that the punk he was saying "Yes, sir" to all over the place was somebody like a shoeshine boy or truck driver or something.

He knew all of the others made fun of him. They didn't even try to hide it. If only he could do something to show he was worthy of respect. If there really was somebody out in the alley, and Vincent could get the drop on him and bring him into where the others were, right smack in front of his pistol—Ernie's pistol. Boy, that would really be something. But, then, if there really *was* somebody outside—

A cop or something?

Or somebody from another gang, trying to—Lord, they might get the drop on him! Or, worse, maybe even *shoot* him!

Lord! He hoped that there wasn't anybody outside. He hoped that it was just an excuse Ernie had made up just so they could change his cards. He *hadn't* heard anything, but then he had been busy concentrating on those

three jacks and two eights. He looked down at the pistol in his right hand. It looked larger and felt heavier than before. It was a revolver, and Vincent knew that he should cock the hammer back in order to get off a quicker shot if the need should arise. But if you cocked the hammer back, it could go off accidentally that much easier. No, he would just keep his thumb over the hammer, so that he *could*—

He had passed through the office and had reached the door. He stopped in his tracks.

It looked very dark out there. Wasn't there supposed to be a street light out back shining light into the alley? Or was it out at the front? Vincent didn't know and, besides, what did that have to do with anything? But if it was the cops, they could have the electric company or somebody turn the light off, just to make their approach to the warehouse easier.

"Vincent! You checked that door yet? Your cards are getting cold."

Ernie, that slob! He could picture him and the others, the six of them leering at each other under the stark light of the bulb strung over the packing crate that served as their card table. Ernie laughing. And the others laughing with him—*with* Ernie, *at him!* They probably had changed the cards by now, so he might as well go ahead and open the—

The door.

Somehow, Ernie didn't want to open it. But he had to. Suppose Ernie or one of the others had gotten up and right now was coming to check to see if he'd done what he was told to do? Suppose somebody was standing in back of him right now? Suppose he was watching? He *couldn't* turn around and see, but it felt kind of funny, as

if maybe someone was behind him. He couldn't *not* open the door.

He placed his left hand on the knob and turned it slowly. Blast the frosted glass that made it impossible to see outside! But were the shadows moving out there? No, just a trick of the light. *What* light? Keep calm, Vincent. Calm as you can, anyway.

Holding the revolver firmly in his right hand, he waited until the knob had turned as far as it would, then he pulled gently. Nothing. He'd forgotten that the door was bolted. Damn! Slowly he eased the knob back to its original position, then taking his left hand from it he slid the bolt from the door. He tried to execute the move as quietly as possible, then realized that his heavy breathing was making more noise than any metallic click might have. Imagination. He wasn't breathing *that* heavily. Maybe it was the punk who was behind him. Maybe he *should* look around and chew out the stupid—

"Vincent! What in blazes you *doing* out there?"

Ernie again. All right, we'll just yank open the door and—

No. Just because Ernie doesn't take his responsibilities seriously—and *he* isn't out here! No, very slowly goes the knob. There. Now very slowly the door swings back. *Enough!*

Vincent Porro peered through the slight crack out into the alley. He held his breath for several seconds, then sighed with relief.

Nothing.

Then he remembered that one of the men might be behind him. He should open the door all the way. Yes. There was no one out there, after all.

Somebody *could* be on the other side of the door, the side he couldn't see from the crack.

But if they were, they already would have pushed the door open, wouldn't they? Unless of course they wanted him in full view so they could gun him down like a sitting duck!

But no. There was no one there.

Vincent Porro aimed his pistol blank ahead and swung back the door wide.

Simultaneously the gun fired and Vincent Porro screamed.

"Vincent—what the God—"

Ernie Lovell stopped as if dead at the open doorway to the office, his speech unable to continue. Across the room—

The huge man in the black cloak was obviously immense in strength as well as stature. He had lifted Vincent Porro about a foot off the floor and bent him back almost double. Ernie could see the whites of his eyes rolled up back into his head. His arms and legs swung limply as the man in black—

Did what? He himself was bent over Vincent, his face apparently buried in the dead man's neck. Why?

And then the man in black moved so that Ernie could see his face over Vincent's. It was the face of an animal with furry brows and sharp, jagged fangs. Blood was everywhere.

It was Ernie's turn to scream; the sound in his own ears startled him into motion. Crashing into the main storage area he tried to call his men to their weapons, but all that came out was a confused babble. In any event, the call to arms was superfluous, the two cries of terror from the office and his own ashen face having been quite enough to bring from the hiding place three pistols and an old-style Thompson submachine gun.

"N-no!" Ernie stuttered. "N-not in there! Let it come to us."

"It?" one of the men asked.

Ernie had filled his own hand now with a .357 Magnum and felt slightly more confident. This would have the stopping power to drop the *thing*—if anything had. If. . .

They stood in a line, the six of them, each facing the doorway to the office. Aside from their own tense breathing, they heard nothing except for a sickening slurp, something like the sound made by someone sucking on a straw when there is barely anything left in the glass. The others looked at Ernie, who avoided their eyes. He knew what it was but he wasn't saying. He *could* not say it. Such things didn't exist—not really. It must have been a trick of the light. Sure. Probably that guy out there had just slashed Vincent's throat with a knife or something and had gotten the blood all over him as well.

But then why would he afterward carry Vincent around like a limp rag doll? And, if he wasn't what Ernie thought he was, what was he? Why was he here?

The shattering of glass whipped all six of them around on their heels. Something had smashed the window fronting the street. Something flickered high over their heads almost at ceiling level. Something with wings.

Then it was gone, dropped somewhere among the stacks of crates.

"I—I don't like this, Ernie," one of the men said.

"What's going on, Ernie?" another demanded. "Who's out there in the office?"

"No one, gentlemen," said the giant of a man stepping from between two large crates. His voice was thickly accented, his black cape wrapped around his body like—*like bat's wings*, Ernie thought. But there were no fangs, only a strange-looking smile. He *had* imagined it!

"No one, as I said, except for your little companion who shall not be rejoining your game or your company. I do not suppose any of you are eager to join *him*?"

Ernie gestured with his Magnum to two of his men. "Take him—no, not that way!" he roared. One of them had lifted his own pistol in the direction of the man in black. "We've already had one blast from Vincent. We don't want cops crawling all over the place."

The man with the gun, who weighed over two-hundred and was the strongest of the mob men hesitated. "Ain't nobody around for blocks to hear anything."

"You heard me, Hupp. I told you and Georgie to take him quiet. Now, do it."

As Hupp and George stepped uncertainly forward, the man in black smiled.

"I see that two of you *are* impatient to join your little friend Vincent. Very well, come closer and I shall give you your wish."

The man called Hupp turned to Ernie. "Now, look—I say we—"

"And *I* say," interrupted the deep foreign voice. "*I* say for you to come closer. You *will* obey me."

And suddenly Hupp turned back toward the stranger. As he and Georgie began their slow walk forward, none of the others could see their faces. If they had been able to, they would have seen blank open-mouthed expressions, perfectly matching the sleepwalking pace at which they moved. When they were directly before the stranger they halted, hands at their sides.

The man in black smiled past them at Ernie. "You sent this muscular one to subdue me physically. Let this serve as an example that no man among you is equal to the task." A black-gloved hand shot out and clutched Hupp's throat. A slight twist of the wrist and there was a loud

snap. Hupp's body sagged, held up only by the hand grasping his neck.

Ernie gasped.

"Okay, Mister, there's one way you can be put down. Gun him!"

The guns, including the Thompson, lifted. Just as fast, Georgie whirled and lifted his own—straight at them! His first shot caught the man with the machine gun in the chest. His second dropped the man to the right of Ernie. He didn't fire a third, a slug from Ernie's Magnum sending him careening off a packing crate about a dozen feet to his rear.

"And then there were two," the stranger said with a sharp laugh. He stepped toward them. Two pistols fired point blank. The cloaked man took both of them under his right shoulder. He staggered only slightly.

Ernie's eyes bulged. *He staggered, that's all!* Both shots had hit him—there were bullet holes, two of them, and one was from his own cannon-like Magnum! He cocked back the hammer for a second shot, aimed, and began to squeeze the trigger. This one he would plant right smack between the eyes!

The eyes.

Ernie could not look at them, and suddenly he found that he could not pull the trigger. His finger—his hand—was somehow frozen! Jerking his head to his partner, he saw a glazed look on the man's face. His weapon, too, was pointing at the black-caped intruder. Again Ernie turned in the direction his weapon pointed. Again his eyes touched upon those burning coals of flickering fire that sent searing darts of pain into his mind. And this time he could not pull his eyes away.

The two red orbs across the room began to enlarge, to

grow as they came ever closer, as the black shroud that encased them loomed nearer.

And now Ernie once again experienced the terror he had known when he had stepped into the office and found Vincent in the hands of—

But he could not *see* beyond those glowing eyes! He did not *know* the shape of the mouth below them! His body began to tremble. He could feel the weight of the weapon in his extended arm. He wanted to bring the arm down now, but he couldn't. He wanted to scream, but he couldn't. His jaw somehow would not allow his mouth to open. He could do nothing but shudder involuntarily, when all around him the light of the large room was disappearing, drawing in upon those two circles of red fire which now were so close that they looked like fist-sized suns streaming through the blackness of space. They were coming towards him like fireballs, already making their intense heat felt on his forehead, transforming his cold sweat into pockets of evaporating steam that were beginning to burn tiny holes into his skull. And now there came to him a command from those suns, a command he did not want to obey but one which he knew he had not the power to disobey.

Trembling still, he felt the muscles of his right shoulder and arm begin to function. He was making them function himself. He did not want them to function, but *he* was making them do so, even knowing full well what they—and the tendons of his hand and fingers, *especially* those!—were going to do once the muzzle of that Magnum was snug against his temple. . . .

And now he could feel the cold steel against the hot wet hair before and above his ear. He could feel his index finger tighten and begin the slow, squeezing—

No! his brain screamed, and it seemed that there was

an answering echo from somewhere in the blackness that enveloped him. And, as if a miracle had taken place, the blackness suddenly flickered with light, a natural kind of light. And then he knew that there had indeed been an echo of his brain-scream, because he heard it again.

"No!" Cam Sanchez roared from the office doorway. "They've got to locate our crate. They can't do it dead!"

Count Dracula arched an eyebrow and smiled. "You are right. I quite forgot myself in the pleasure of the moment. Cancel that last request, gentlemen. You may allow your pistols to drop to the floor. You may question them now if you wish. I am certain they will cooperate. Is that not true, gentlemen?"

Ernie and the other man nodded dumbly.

"I could not hear your answer, I'm afraid. I was expecting to hear two voices responding *yes, sir*. You will oblige me?"

"Y-yes, sir." In unison.

"Thank you." To Cam, he said, "They are yours."

"Consignment DH 977. I want it. Right now. Where is it?"

"Speak freely, gentlemen. My patience wanes."

Ernie's lips quivered. "We don't know anything about individual consignment numbers. Except for the ones here."

The other man nodded eagerly. "I don't even know about the ones here. I don't know nothing. Ernie's the one, he knows all there is to know about this place. I don't—*argggggghhh—hiiiiieee!*"

The two-syllable scream ended in a whimper as Dracula released the man's right arm which he had wrenched from its shoulder socket.

Cam winced but concentrated on Ernie. "Is he right? You're the boss of this operation?"

"Of *this* operation, sure! But this is only one warehouse out of I don't know how many. If we got a package of yours, it could be in any one of them. How should I know which. . . ?"

Ernie's voice trailed off as Dracula's eyes burned into his.

"You should be aware, my fat friend, that you are alive right now because you are of some use to us. Again I am forced to illustrate my meaning. By your statement and his own admission, your companion here can tell us nothing, is that not so?"

"Yeah, but—"

"In that case, I suggest you watch closely what will surely be a much more personally involved happening should we find you as uninformative as your friend."

The "friend" at this point was still sobbing from the pain in his shoulder. Suddenly he seemed to realize that something was going to happen to him; something more, something worse than—

He opened his mouth but no sound came out. Just as before, he found he could move no part of his body, only his eyes which were fastened on the face before him, a face that was changing into something nonhuman, a face that was coming closer and closer and lowering toward his throat and now—*now*. . .

Something jabbed into his throat, something at first painful—as if a sharp razor had slashed him—but the pain was momentary, burned away by the searing heat of the thing or things that had been inserted into his torn flesh. Even the pain of his shoulder now seemed to disappear as the heat spread downward and outward to his extremities. With that part of his mind that was not numbed

by terror, he knew the instant when the expanding heat suddenly began to retract. Something was now *draining* from his throat all the warmth that was retracting from his body!

The coldness began at his fingers and toes. It moved upward slowly, leaving numbness behind it. It was as if the very life of those parts had exited, seeking higher ground in the face of a threat from rising waters. But the rising fluid was his very own blood. The liquid of life was being drawn to that place in his throat where entry had been made, and somehow it was not the horrible thing that he would have thought it to be. It was instead a peaceful kind of ending.

The nothingness rose higher and higher now until he was only *something* in the two centers of his being, his heart and his brain. He knew that there was to be no more time allowed him, no more life to live or to enjoy, and in that moment he wondered about Death, if after the cold had obliterated him there would be nothing more than this canceling of self. It was perhaps his first philosophical thought. It was, in any case, his last.

"Now," Dracula said in a low growl as he turned his eyes from his fallen victim toward Ernie. "Now you will answer all questions put to you in the most *useful* way you know."

Ernie's eyes blinked affirmation, even though they could not free themselves from the two rows of wet red teeth that glistened in the light of the overhead bulbs.

Cam asked his questions quickly.

"Do you have consignment DH 977 here?"

"No. I got no 977's at all. They're somewhere else."

"Where?"

"I—I don't know."

"The letter we sent back to Freight Recovery Inc. That was brought here."

"Maybe. I don't know. I don't look at them. But we get all the ones from two post offices boxes; both of them are in Manhattan. They stay here until they get picked up."

"Who picks them up?"

"Danny."

"Danny who?"

"Danny. That's all I know him by. Once a day he comes and collects the letters."

"He's been here today?"

"Earlier. This morning, about nine."

Cam considered. Obviously Harmon's response had not yet been picked up. That was bad. Unless—

"When there's trouble—if there should be trouble here—do you have a telephone number to call?"

Ernie nodded.

"Fine. Where's the phone? In the office?"

Again Ernie nodded.

They went into the office. Cam handed him the telephone.

"All right. You dial the number and tell whoever answers who you are, then say that there has been some trouble. That's all, nothing more. You say there's been trouble and shut your mouth. I'll click off the connection. Understood?"

"Y-yes." He could not take his eyes off those teeth!

After telling Cam the number, he dialed it.

Cam could hear the ringing. Once. Twice. Three times.

There was a click. "Hello."

"This is Ernie."

A pause. "Something the matter? You're not supposed to call this number—*ever*—unless—"

"Yes, sir. Trouble. We've had—*help me, it's a vampire!*"

Cam was not sure that he'd pressed the button down fast enough to keep Ernie's death-scream from reaching his contact. He was, however, sure about one thing. He left the office and went out into the warehouse proper. He found what he was looking for under one of the bodies. The Thompson.

He emptied it into the throat and face areas of three of the dead men. Vincent, Ernie and the other man the vampire had attacked with his fangs. The Count, looking once again like urbane nobility, found the action amusing.

"Laugh," Cam snarled. "But this serves two purposes. It covers up what really happened here and it also suggests another alternative. Another gang, maybe trying to move in on this one's operations. If we're lucky, we could start a full-scale war."

"And war is something you find appealing?"

"War among animals, yes. And that's what these are—animals."

"And how about myself? How would you characterize me?"

Cam looked at him straight in the face. "You've said you're not all that crazy about the word *vampire*, but that's about the best I can do. Right now, anyway. We don't have time for semantics. I think Danny whoever-he-is will be on his way here right now. It was a Queens exchange, so it will take him a little while. But he'll show, maybe in a half-hour or hour. Then, when he gets a look at what's happened here, he'll lead us to the next level of the hierarchy—assuming he can't tell us what we want to know. In any case, it's simply a matter of playing follow-the-leader."

The words rang in his ears. He remembered Harmon

had used them that night on the walls of Castle Dracula. Who was the follower, really, and who the leader? How would you characterize the deadly spider who did not follow and did not lead, but merely waited?

"Simple for you, perhaps," the Count was saying as he watched Cam carefully wipe the machine gun free from fingerprints. He'd done the same to the telephone earlier. "For me it is not so simple. While it is hours from dawn light, I do not care to play it close to the line—for obvious reasons. Thus, I shall not be able to engage in your follow-the-leader game. Not tonight."

From Cam's pocket came a voice from Westhampton. "He's right, Cam. You can handle the next step on your own. Good luck."

Good luck.

As Cam sat behind the wheel of the Cadillac and watched the white blips heading eastward on the green glass screen, he thought about Harmon's sign-off. Good luck, all right. They would need it. They would need Danny to show up tonight. They would need Cam's ability to place tiny objects where they would be effective in range. They would need knowledge—Danny's or somebody else's—transmitted through Cam's listening devices or extracted by other means.

Now that Cam had seen those other means, now that he had seen Harmon's "formidable weapon" in action, they would need good luck, yes. Most of all, though, they *had* to have that crate. That recharger *had* to be built.

The alternatives were not pleasant to think on.

Forty-five minutes later, a wine-red sportscar cut off its lights a block away from the warehouse. It moved slowly for half a block and stopped. Minutes passed, six and a half exactly. Then the driver's door quietly opened and

a tall lean man in his early thirties, wearing a flashy checkered sports jacket, uncurled himself and stepped out onto the sidewalk. His right hand was buried in the jacket pocket as he walked leisurely to the warehouse door. As he passed under the light coming from the utility pole, Cam saw that his features were handsome in a nightclub singer's way. No doubt, if this guy traveled in the right circles, he was tagged as one of the Beautiful People.

Cam wished that he could see those beautiful features when he discovered what awaited him inside the warehouse. Unfortunately, that could not be. Cam had to be outside the building. Down where that sportscar was parked.

He had to plant a little bug.

CHAPTER 11

Danny Trafalgar drained the bottom dregs of his cold coffee and considered pouring himself another cup. He rejected the idea since it meant he'd have to get up from the chair behind the desk and cross the room, and he was too worn out. Physically and mentally.

He'd been at the warehouse since two or shortly after and it was now almost eight in the morning. The first fifteen minutes after his arrival he'd spent in a state close to shock. He'd seen dead men before, that was nothing new to him, but whoever did this job had added a new brand of sadism to gangland murder. Not only the three who had been machine-gunned in the face at close range, but the other thing—Hupp's broken neck and Gino's arm, pulled right out of the shoulder socket! This wasn't any ordinary raid, but Danny had a germ of a theory about it.

There was that scream of Ernie's he'd heard over the phone. He had a theory about that, too, and it fit his general idea of what might have happened.

Whoever they were, though, they either were very good or they had caught Ernie and his men half-asleep.

Anyway, there had been little he could do about setting the hit straight right then. The important thing was to get things cleaned up.

He dialed a Long Island number and reported briefly on the scene. Then he called one of his several underlings and ordered up a clean-up crew and a small van. It was after three when they arrived and began working. Less than five hours later, they were ready to go, their job completed.

"They're in the van?" he asked the driver, who nodded yes. "Okay. You know where to take them. And be careful. No speeding violations with a truck full of stiff, you hear?"

The driver nodded and shortly afterward Danny heard the van pull out into the street. His second-in-command came into the office and asked if there was anything else. Danny said no, that everybody should get on home and get some sleep. On second thought, better leave one man here. "Just to keep an eye on the place. Also we need somebody to make a pickup today. Vincent won't be around to do it." They discussed the schedule, and everybody except the one man remaining behind left the warehouse.

As Danny climbed into his sportscar, he tapped the four envelopes in his inside jacket pocket. At least something looked promising this morning. If he remembered his consignment numbers correctly, this batch ought to bring in a little over \$60,000. Sixty of the big ones. Very nice indeed, and no doubt an adequate temptation for somebody to try and take this business from his organization. But trying isn't doing. Others had found that out, and these new "others"—whoever they were—would learn

likewise. When you had a business only a part of which could bring you \$60,000 in a single day, you made sure you held onto it.

Shoving his floor-mounted gearstick shift into first, Danny swung the little car north. He was wondering about one particular consignment, DH 977. *Scientific equipment*, the crate was labeled, and this one they opened to see just what it contained. A lot of *scientific equipment*—that's all they could tell when finished. Most crates they didn't bother to open, but this one they did. They were curious and they knew from experience that often the insured value of something had little or nothing to do with actual value. Some shippers over-insured and others did the opposite—sometimes in order to avoid attention to what they were bringing into the country. DH 977 had been insured for \$18,000, thus it deserved a close inspection. Nothing inside looked to be worth that much, but some things you couldn't tell about. Like the cost figures given for some of that stuff they developed for moon shots. The stuff in DH 977 could be worth anywhere from \$180,000 to a hundredth of that figure.

But one thing argued for a fairly high value, and that was the speed with which DH had responded to the initial letter. It would be interesting to see just how fast—and how—Danny's second letter would be answered. First, of course, Danny would have to figure out the "finder's fee," but that could wait until after he'd grabbed a couple of hours sleep. Except for DH 977, the other three were easy to figure. One was a big crate of antiques with the assessed valuations right along with them, the second was a shipment of furs, and the third was full of designer's originals from Paris. On second thought, maybe one of his contracts on Seventh Avenue would go a steep price to use the originals to have copies made. Maybe. Or maybe

he could "loan" them for a week or so and then sell them to their addressee. That way he could pocket the first money himself. He would think about it later. First came home, his Greenwich Village apartment, and then bed and sleep.

Home came as planned, but the sleep would be put off. Danny found the telephone ringing as he closed the third-floor apartment door behind him. Lifting the receiver, he recognized the voice on the other end.

"Danny, I tried to get you at the warehouse. The guy there said you just left."

"You got me now, Albert. What is it?"

"Nothing—except that the old man wants a full report on what happened. From you personally. This afternoon at the Nassau place, two o'clock sharp. Got it?"

Danny sighed wearily. "Right, I got it."

"Also he wants to see the bodies of your men who got hit. Same time, same place."

"The *bodies*? Albert, that's not possible. I've already given orders to have them incinerated. They're on their way to the place now. And there's no phone out there!"

"Then you better hop in that little car of yours and speed along right out after them, pal. I told you, the old man wants to see them. In corpse form, not ashes. Two o'clock. Nassau."

The phone clicked dead.

Cam Sanchez wondered at Danny Trafalgar's rush out the front door of his apartment house. Watching him pile into the sportscar, he smiled. He'd catch up with him in a few minutes, courtesy of the directional finder. He reached into the glove compartment and pulled out two leather packets. One contained a set of tiny tools that made no lock a useful barrier. The other contained a compact lis-

tening device. Then he stepped from the car and crossed the street to the apartment building.

From the head of the table, Frank Anthony jabbed an almost skeletal finger in the direction of Danny Trafalgar.

"So you tell *me*, Danny. You tell me this big theory of yours."

The table, covered with a red and white checkerboard cloth, was in the back room of a family-type restaurant in Nassau, not far from the organization's warehouse. Danny had arranged for the bodies to be there at two. Frank Anthony had arrived on the dot. He had spent an overlong amount of time, Danny thought, examining the dead men, then instructed his aide to call a meeting at the restaurant. The gathering was set for three-thirty to allow all of his lieutenants time enough to drive from their offices or homes.

Danny did not doubt that all would show. Meetings of all of them were a rarity, for the obvious security reasons, but when Frank Anthony called for a meet, there was a meet. Frank Anthony now was an old man, but as head of operations he still commanded the respect he earned in the old days as a "soldier" in Brooklyn. In those years he was called Frank the Grip. There were various stories about how he earned the name, none of them pleasant. One of them said that it was given to him as a joke when he held onto another mobster's ear so tight that it ripped clean from the man's head. The story goes that Frank was pouring acid in the rival mobster's face at the time.

But he had been loyal and he had been tough and he had survived, moving undramatically up through the ranks as reward for his steadfast service. As head of the warehousing operation, he demanded unyielding loyalty from all his lieutenants, punishing slight infractions ruthlessly.

He was an old man, yes, but respected. In Danny's experience *respected* was a simple translation of *feared*.

Danny Trafalgar had not been to a lieutenants' meeting before. He himself was a lower rank, second man under Albert Bosch, one of the six men who ringed the table in the hard wooden chairs. Danny himself sat at the far end of the table. He was not sure he should feel at all comfortable at his first lieutenants' meet.

"So tell me, Danny," Frank repeated. "Tell me and these others about your big-deal theory."

Danny suddenly felt he should be standing up when addressing this group of men. He stood hastily, then forced himself to be calm.

"We're waiting, Danny."

"Yes, sir—er—Frank. Well, like I already told you, I think we got hit by another organization, somebody who's trying to muscle in on us."

"And which organization would that be, Danny?"

A pause. "I don't know—not yet. But I plan to start finding out later this afternoon. I've been kind of busy, getting the warehouse cleaned up and all."

The old man cast a look at Albert Bosch. Albert nodded. "I checked it out, Frank. Danny's boys did a real clean job."

"Good," Frank said. "How about you, Albert? You got a theory about what happened last night?"

Albert considered. "Well, there's always Danny's explanation. That's always possible. Then, there's that other thing, too."

"What other thing, Albert?"

"You know, Frank. What Ernie said on the phone."

"What Ernie said," Frank repeated. "You mean when he *screamed*, Albert. When he screamed *vampire*. That is what you heard, isn't it, Danny?"

"Sure, Frank, that's what I heard."

"Real clear? It couldn't have been anything else?"

"I suppose it could have. I mean, he was *yelling*. But I'm as sure as I can be that that's what he said."

"And what do you make of it, what he said?"

"I figure that this other group, the one I'll find when my looking is done, hired a couple of heavies from one of them motorcycle gangs. Maybe there's a gang called The Vampires—or maybe just one of the gang calls himself Vampire and has the name of his jacket."

"That's a lot of maybe's, Danny."

"Like I said, I'm going to have it all checked out."

Frank nodded. "You do that. In the meantime there's that other maybe to think about. You are a young man, Danny, born and raised in this country. But some of us who knew the Old Country—we do not scoff at certain things."

"Like vampires? Real vampires? Frank—vampires don't kill with machine guns. Not in the movies I've seen, anyway."

Frank's eyes narrowed. "The *movies* know little of such matters. But you are right. Vampires do not kill with machine guns. They do not have to." He paused. "Tell me, Danny, tell all of us how you think Hupp got his neck broken and how Gino's arm got pulled out of its socket. No, don't tell us. You don't know. But you would have to admit that these acts would have to have been done by somebody with a great amount of strength—almost super-human strength."

"Okay, so they were strong—at least one of them was—and they were mean, too. I told you that already."

"You also told us that almost all the guns in the place had been fired, some more than once."

"That's right. I checked all of them."

"Then doesn't it seem just a little unusual to you—just a little bit strange—that none of your boys appeared to have hit any of their attackers? No bodies, no blood, that didn't belong to your own men. Were they such bad shots?"

"Well, little Vincent—"

Albert cut him off. "Vincent couldn't even talk straight, let alone shoot. But Ernie could blast the tail feathers from a pigeon at twenty yards with a pistol. And Hupp and Gino—"

"*Okay!* Okay. I don't know why they didn't hit anybody. Unless they *did*, and somebody moved the bodies before I got there. Maybe they took their dead and wounded with them."

Frank tapped his fingernails on the tablecloth. "Still another maybe. You're piling them up like a poker player stacking chips. But let's talk about the machine-gunning. Why do you suppose the attackers—if there was more than one—shot up the boys the way they did? I mean, why just *three* of them? Why not the others as well?"

"I figure that there was just one of them who was a maniac. The others were taken out by saner members."

"You mean a kind of—what's the word? Sadist?"

"Yeah, a sadist. That's right."

Frank smiled thinly. "You don't know much about sadists, Danny." He turned to the man to his right. "Joey, if you were going to do a thing like Danny says one of his sadists would do, how would you do it? Would you blast away at their faces and shoulders?"

Joey shook his head. "The gut. From the bottom up. The poor slob stays alive longer and you can watch his pain."

"Then why, Joey, would anyone want to do it the way they did it?"

"I dunno, Frank."

Again Frank's fingertips drummed the table. "Maybe to cover up something?"

"Frank—" Danny pleaded. "Cover up *what*?"

"Cover up the *fact*—" Frank had started to get up from his chair. Easing himself back down, he started again. "Vampires, like you say, don't kill with guns. They don't have to. They have supernatural strength. They also can't be killed by bullets, Danny—you think about that and all the bullets your men fired. But the important thing right here is the way vampires kill, when they're hungry, at least. They tear their victims' throats open. Then they drink the blood. Does that square with your knowledge, Danny?"

"I wouldn't call it *knowledge*, Frank. But, yeah, that's the way the stories go."

"It also is the way at least two of the machine-gunned bodies went. Whoever tried to hide the throat-slashing with bullets did a sloppy job. It would have been okay if no one thought to look real careful, but those necks were slashed!"

"Okay—so somebody slashed their throats. A knife could do that."

"That is true, Danny, but then why would anyone else take the trouble to pump bullets into three dead men? And why, with the amount of slashing that took place, wasn't there more blood on the men's clothing? What are your answers to those questions? I'll tell *you*. You *have* no answers, none that I want to hear. Not right now, anyway. Danny, you do your checking, just like you said you were going to. But you—and all the rest of you. I want our warehouses under heavy guard from here on in.

And at the least little sign of trouble—at the least little sign of anything unusual—I want to be called.”

He paused. “If last night’s attack was caused by a vampire—if it was—it might just be that he chose our location because of accident. But it also might be because we have got something he wants. It could be that one of the crates we’ve got in one of our warehouses belongs to him. Maybe he got it last night—and, Danny, I want you to run a complete check on the Brooklyn inventory to see if anything’s missing—but if he didn’t get it, he may come looking elsewhere. I know—now it’s Frank who’s coming up with all the maybe’s. But we ain’t taking no chances, not if there is one of these things on the loose. If we somehow have gotten hold of something he wants, we give it to him. Fast and with no questions asked. Does everybody understand me?”

Everybody understood. Everybody included a bullet-headed Puerto Rican in the general dining room outside. Pocketing his pencil-like unidirectional listener, he paid for his pizza and beer and left the restaurant.

CHAPTER 12

Darkness had fallen. Danny Trafalgar had just replaced the telephone on its receiver when the door buzzer from downstairs sounded. He crossed the room to the speaker.

"Yes?"

"Danny. It's Donna."

Donna. He'd forgotten she was coming over tonight. For a moment he considered telling her to come back tomorrow night. He was exhausted, and what he needed now was some sleep. He'd just finished all the work he could do—setting into motion his fact-finding missions directed toward the three gangs he suspected might be at the bottom of his troubles and also preparing his people for a possible war in the event his suspicions proved correct. He was looking forward to a couple of heavy Scotches and then a long night's sleep.

"Danny?"

He pressed the button unlocking the downstairs door. He could sleep a little later. There was no reason he couldn't have those Scotches and Donna together.

As she came into the apartment, Danny was glad he had made what he now considered was the right choice. She was tall and willowy, almost a perfect model type. She in fact had done some modeling for some of Danny's friends, but her build was wrong to get any of the really big jobs. The problem was her breasts which were too large for the current fashionable look. Which, in Danny's opinion, didn't say much for the current fashionable look. In his view, Donna's top half would never go out of style.

She was dressed for action, too, her silvery satin dress clinging to mid-section, lovely hips and long slim legs and pushing upward and outward her unfashionable upper assets. Her blonde hair—not natural but who cared?—spilled over her shoulders in a setting that was not the carefree look of present style but one reminiscent of a time when more women spent more time in front of the mirror teasing their hair. Hair wasn't the only thing Donna was good at teasing.

Her face was pixyish and even though Danny felt she used too much makeup around the eyes, it made her even more sexy to him. Her intelligence was as lacking as her body was stacked. She was an almost perfect example of what Hollywood used to offer as the standard dumb-blonde stereotype. She was not aware, exactly, of what it was Danny did for a living. She knew he had something to do with a lot of people who, because they were criminals, Donna thought were glamorous, or at least she thought Danny was. Danny didn't much care about what she thought as long as she was available to him when he wanted her. But somehow he didn't seem to be all that interested in her once she had poured them both drinks and had made herself comfortable on the divan.

"Danny, is there something the matter?"

"You wouldn't understand," he told her curtly.

"Well, I *might* if you told me about it."

Sure. On the other hand, it might do some good to talk about it. At least, it might clarify some of his own thoughts for himself.

"One of my bosses believes in vampires. You know, the big bats that can change themselves into men—or men that can change themselves to bats—and who drink the blood of their victims."

Donna grasped her shoulders and pretended to shudder. "Oh, Danny, that's *creepy!*" Then she thought about it and added, "How come your boss believes in them—the vampires?"

"He thinks some friends of ours might have gotten killed by a vampire."

"W-what do you think, Danny?"

He did not miss the fact that just talking about vampires had broken down her light attitude. "Well, I happened to see the men's throats, and they *could* have been ripped open by big sharp teeth—"

"Danny, I don't want to talk about that no more. Let's talk about something else."

"Like what? How about these stories about how Egyptian mummies which were buried thousands of years ago came to life and killed the people who dug them up?"

"*Please, Danny!*"

"All right. Build me another drink." He held out his empty glass. When Donna had taken it to the bar, he rose and went to one of the two big French windows which faced out onto the street. It was very dark out there, hardly any moon at all, and the street lights at the corners did not seem to extend their beams to this central part of the block. Funny. You never thought about such things until somebody put something in your mind that

was—well, *creepy*, to use Donna's word. Something foolish, was what Danny really thought about it.

"Do you think it's going to rain, Danny?" she asked him, coming to his side. "The radio said today that they thought it might."

Safe topic, the weather. But Danny turned it around just to watch the expression on her face.

"Sure. I think it's going to rain bats and dogs."

"Please? I don't want to think about all that." A well-manicured hand went to her throat in an almost instinctive protective reaction.

"Okay." He brought her away from the window to the center of the room. "Why don't you sort of go into the bedroom and slip into something more comfortable? I'm in the mood to act a little like a vampire myself tonight—and you're going to be my victim. All night long, if the victim proves herself worthy of my attention."

He had spoken in a lighthearted way, and she giggled as she started for the door. She stopped in her tracks with the crash from behind her.

As she turned, she saw Danny had pulled a small automatic pistol from inside his jacket and was facing one of the large French windows. The window had somehow blown open and the sound had been caused by its swinging all the way around and smacking off the adjoining wall. The glass, however, had not broken.

"Any-anybody out there, D-Danny?"

"There couldn't be. There's no ledge or a balcony or nothing. Just probably a sudden gust of wind and a worn-out catch." But she noticed his tone was shaky. Also, he had not put away the gun.

"You probably ought to get that fixed."

"Sure. In the morning, maybe." He turned to her and

smiled faintly. "Hey, I thought I told you to get ready—ready for your own special vampire attack."

His smile became a grotesque leer as he spread his arms high and wide to resemble the wings of a huge bat. Her reaction was as he had anticipated, but even more so. He had expected her eyes to widen and her mouth to open. But he had not expected her to lose her Florida tan instantly. And he had not expected the shrill scream.

But then he could not see what Donna saw.

Behind the man who *played* bat, was something big and black whose wing span over-reached that of the mocking man's. Where the wings joined was a horrible little head with bright red bullet-eyes and sharp dagger teeth from which saliva dripped into the furry lower jaw. It seemed to just hang there in the space behind Danny, not moving, just hovering, and gloating.

It was then Danny noticed that the girl was not looking directly at him, but slightly above him and to his right. His hand still held the pistol and as he whirled it was cocked and ready. He did not fire the weapon.

His first vision of the creature froze him to the spot. Then, before his eyes, the impossible appeared to happen. There was a blurring sensation, and the great flying creature was gone. In its place was a dark man of huge dimensions and flaming red eyes. As the eyes concentrated on Danny, the little automatic slipped from his grip to fall harmlessly to the thick carpeting.

"W-who—"

"My name is of little concern to you. Let us say that I represent a customer of yours, that I have come to avail myself of the services of Freight Recovery Inc. I am told that you in particular can assist me."

"It was you . . . last night—"

"Last night or any other is unimportant. There is a box

you have in your possession in which I am particularly interested. Your designation for it is DH 977. Its exact location, please."

Danny's thoughts jumbled, but Frank Anthony's instructions sounded as clear as a bell. *If we somehow have gotten hold of something he wants, we give it to him. Fast and with no questions asked.*

"Warehouse . . . in Merrick. Out on the Island."

"The exact address, please."

Danny gave it. "I could have them deliver—"

"That will not be necessary, Mr. Trafalgar. We will collect the consignment ourselves." Suddenly the face of the big man began to change. A muffled sigh came from the girl as she slumped to the floor in a faint. As for Danny—

"W-what are you g-going to do—"

"To you? What it has been deemed you fully deserve. I have no further use of you."

The young man's eyes darted wildly about the room to avoid looking into that horrible face, the face which was coming nearer and nearer with each frantic heartbeat, coming in a slow methodically straight-line path which if only Danny's muscles would function. . .

But they would not! *Could not!*

Then, suddenly, the vampire stopped. He seemed to be listening to someone speaking to him but there was no one else in the room. A leering smile came to the vampire's lips. His deep voice spoke.

"You have been granted a short reprieve, Mr. Trafalgar. It seems an associate of mine has been monitoring your telephone calls. He wishes you to call the three minions of yours with whom you spoke earlier in the day. He would like you to tell them that, through investigations of your own, you have uncovered facts which prove the

organizations they are checking up on are responsible for the business of last evening. You will tell them that therefore the war is on as of right now. You will do this for us?"

"A-all three gangs?"

Dracula advanced a step. "Did I not make myself clear?"

"Yes! Yes. All three gangs. V-very clear." Feeling his body now released from the icy hold which had gripped it, Danny moved to the telephone and, under the watchful red eyes of the creature who stood beside him, began to dial the first number.

"One thing more, Mr. Trafalgar. There shall be no histrionics, such as those which caused the termination of your man Ernie."

It took less than ten minutes. Two of those Danny phoned were not sure that they should rush into hitting the other gang, but he was firm. "You think these orders come from just me?" he shouted at one. (On his way to the Merrick warehouse, Cam Sanchez could not help but smile at that one.) Finally, the orders were accepted and Danny informed the creature in black that within the hour the shooting would begin.

At this point, the vampire took his attention from the mobster and stood over the girl on the floor. He looked at her for a long moment, as if making a difficult decision; then suddenly she began to revive. As she raised herself to a sitting position, Dracula spoke softly to her.

"You may go, young lady. I have no business with you. First, however, you will look at me, directly into my eyes." As she tranquilly obeyed, he spoke again: "You will go directly home and go to bed and sleep. When you awaken, you will not remember having come here this

evening. You will remember nothing of what you have seen and heard. Repeat my instructions, please."

She repeated them, her face reflecting her deep trance. Picking up her things, she let herself out of the apartment, Dracula appearing to dwell overlong upon the door which closed behind her. Danny Trafalgar's voice changed the direction of the vampire's attention.

"You—you let her go?"

His voice was hopeful, his hope obvious. But the vampire quickly dashed that hope.

"Yes, I let her go. I do not like to have spectators present when I dine."

"When you—"

"Dine," Dracula repeated quietly.

By ten o'clock, the rain that had been predicted for the evening had begun to fall in light but steady sheets. At least, the lower section of Long Island was covered by the dark cloud front which spewed downward from the sky the chilling wetness that made the smooth street surfaces glisten like mirrors and, where the surfaces were not smooth, filled ruts and holes with ankle-soaking ice water.

The Merrick warehouse was located strategically, similar to the organization's Brooklyn place. Containing buildings of storage on either side, the street upon which it fronted ended in a cul-de-sac and depended upon its night lighting from a single street lamp at a corner far from the Freight Recovery Inc. location and one other source, a weak mercury-vapor watch-light on the building to the rear of—and thus mostly hidden by—the end structure on the cul-de-sac.

There was but one motor vehicle parked on the street, a station wagon with its rear gate open. At precisely 10:03 a large man opened a side door of the warehouse closest

to the station wagon and approached the open gate. He carried a medium-sized crate which he placed in the rear of the wagon. Closing the gate, he moved silently back into the warehouse office and continued out to the main storage area. There were eight men in the large room. One was a tall man dressed in black who stood silently in the center of the room. Seven of them were lying in strange positions among packing crates that had been upset, each of them very dead. When Cam Sanchez had inspected each body he was satisfied that all was as it should be. There would be no need for any kind of cover-up as he had had to perform the previous night.

It had been very neat, very efficient, very quiet. Other than the short cries of surprise—and death—there had been no noise. No gun had been fired in the attack which had swiftly blotted out the lives of the seven. He had killed one of the men himself, the others being taken out by the strong hands of the Count. Hands, not teeth. It was fortunate that the vampire's bloodlust had been satisfied earlier in the evening.

The Count smiled. "This ends it, then. The crate with the marking DH 977 is returned to your custody. Thus my obligation to you is complete. It is time for me to return to my resting place."

Cam shook his head. "Not yet. There are several hours before morning. While I must return to the house with the crate, there is one more thing you have to accomplish. One more little chore to complete before the coming of the dawn."

Dracula's smile turned into a frown. "This one more little chore. This is the professor's idea or is it your own?"

"Mine. But if you like, we can ask him for his views on the subject."

The vampire laughed shortly. "There is hardly a need to do that. Harmon's sense of *vendetta* is highly developed—much more so than your own."

Cam's nostrils flared. "It is not a matter of *vendetta*!"

"You can call it as you will, it is of little import to me. You would wipe the face of the earth clean of these *animals*, as you call them. That is your business. But you do not hesitate to use another animal to accomplish your ends. The phrase is, I believe, fighting fire with fire. Is that not so?"

"That's the phrase, yes."

The Count's lips curled in a wry smile. "The phrase—and the philosophy as well. There is another phrase which also is applicable, however, and I trust you will have reason to recall it at a moment not too far removed from this. It also has to do with fire. It states quite simply what can happen when one gets too close to the flames."

"One can get burned," Cam supplied.

Dracula's smile widened. "One *does* get burned. Invariably."

CHAPTER 13

Somewhat to the east of Professor Harmon's Westhampton house is the community of Quoque, a section of which is known for its large estates belonging to people of wealth. The grounds of these pieces of property are extensive and are noted for the high walls of stone which guarantee their owners an almost unassailable degree of privacy, a protection against the great unwashed mass of common people who, on the other side of those walls, in that other world out there, perform the acts of labor and even pleasure, the benefits of which mostly accrue to those who live within the walled mansions of Quoque and those segments of other communities which mirror it along the Eastern seaboard.

Grounds and walls, to some, are not enough to keep out unwanted eyes. Several of those great houses, therefore, employ among their huge staffs minions whose chief job it is to insure that penetration does not take place. These minions carry guns, and do not hesitate to pull the triggers of those weapons. On occasion, there have been

instances where a hard-working salesman of insurance or some other commodity finds he had no opportunity to explain his unwanted presence on the wrong side of the walls; but the efficiency of wealth—plus the large estates themselves—are sufficient to cover up many bullet-ridden bodies.

The grounds of one particular house in Quoque contained three such innocent intruders. The house belonged to Frank Anthony.

Among the people living within the walls of the house were fifteen retainers, or "house guests," ten of whom were in the nature of employed bodyguards. In his years of experience, Frank Anthony had learned that too much precaution is impossible. Always there would be some young crazy punk who would figure he could make a name for himself by knocking off somebody like Frank Anthony. It had been that way even in the beginning of his career. It would be that way until the day he died.

Frank Anthony's men understood this state of mind well. Among the bodyguards, probably Larry Cord had lived with it longer than any of the others. Larry Cord was a thin, wiry man just over six feet in height. He was an efficient killer with knife and garrot, and had fought with acid and Molotov cocktails in his time. He carried a .45 Colt standard army issue automatic and kept it loaded with hollowed out dum-dum slugs. He did not like using the gun, but when he had to he enjoyed watching the dum-dums work. Small hole in front going in, a Grand Canyon in back plowing out.

Larry Cord many times had been issued orders to tighten security around the house. Usually this meant some kind of war had started or was about to start, and when Frank had come back from his meet this afternoon one of his aides had said something about the possibility.

But this time Frank seemed to have gone a little bit overboard.

For example, Larry didn't think the dogs really were necessary. The men on the grounds all were armed, plus the fact there was the electrified fence that spanned the top of the walls on all sides. That was security enough, or should be. And the dogs—six Dobermans—while deadly killers, were also unpredictable. They'd just as likely tear apart one of Frank's own men as any intruder. If they were let loose, that is. Sure, they had been chained to trees spotted throughout the grounds, but they were only effective as instruments of death within those tight circles. Otherwise they were nothing more than watchdogs; they would signal with barks that something was not as it should be. Six cocker spaniels would have served as well. And trained or not, the Dobermans had the unnerving and exasperating habit of going nuts whenever a squirrel came near them. At each alarm, somebody would have to go and investigate. It was 10:30, and already Larry had had to get too close to those shark-fanged dogs a dozen times. Once he did see a squirrel, but that was all. He'd felt like blowing the little animal's brains out, but checked the impulse.

But armed men and killer dogs were one thing. The garlic was something else again. All over the place, strings of the stuff. Over doors and windows, even the ones on the top floor. Larry himself had had to go to five grocery stores to get the hundred strings the old man had ordered, and even then that wasn't enough and one of the other men had to be sent out for more garlic. The stuff was great in spaghetti, but who in his right mind would hang it all over the outside of a house.

One of the guys who was pretty close to Frank said it had something to do with ghosts or something, that it

would keep them away. Larry had asked him, "If it's ghosts Frank is afraid of; then what are we doing with all the guns and dogs? You can't shoot a ghost, can you? The other man had shrugged and said "that maybe Frank was worried about some other mob *and* a ghost, too."

Garlic. Larry wondered whether the old man wasn't going batty; but he kept the thought to himself.

On top of all that was the rain. A light drizzle, but very cold, which was bound to bring on pneumonia. Fortunately, Larry was in charge so he'd posted himself on the front porch under the protection of the elaborately carved overhang. Surrounded by the strings of garlic, which he could almost smell through their skins!

Off to his right a Doberman started to sound off, then abruptly stopped. Good, Larry thought. Far enough away that one of the other guys can catch cold checking it out. Besides, the rain also was blotting out any moonlight that would serve at least to highlight those chains. Larry had the definite feeling that somebody was going to get himself killed tonight, but not from any marauder or ghost. It was going to be in the jaws of one of those devil-dogs.

Another racket, same direction as the other. A snarling bark. Larry couldn't blame the animal. He probably liked being out in the rain just as much as a human. More barking. Wasn't anybody going to check it? He grunted to himself. Probably the damned dog was snarling at the poor water-soaked clown who *had* checked it.

Still more barking, then a high-pitched snarl which broke off into a startled whimper. Then silence. Larry cursed and stepped off the front porch out into the rain. Somebody had better check and see what was bothering the Doberman, and he had no way of telling if anybody

was doing it. So, like always, it was a matter of doing things yourself.

The echo of his feet sloshing through the rain-drenched grass made him shudder as he approached the part of the front lawn where he thought the sounds had come from. He stopped and narrowed his eyes to get a better view of the landscape. Nothing. He stepped around a chest-high hedge and then he saw the dog.

It lay on the grass on its side. Approaching the animal carefully, Larry listened for its breathing. Nothing. But you couldn't be sure; the soft sounds of the falling rain might cover up the rhythmic inhaling and exhaling of a sleeping dog. Except that he knew almost immediately that the dog was not simply sleeping. Its back seemed bent into a very strange angle. When he reached a point about six feet from the animal, he moved around to its tail end and pulled his pistol free from its shoulder holster. Extending the gun so that it pointed directly at the space between the big dog's ears, he cocked the hammer back. With his left hand he gently touched the animal's right rear leg. There was no reaction. Grasping the leg tightly, he lifted his hand high. The rear half of the dog rose with it; the front half shifted its position only slightly but awkwardly.

The Doberman's back had been broken, there was no doubt about it. But who? Had it been some enemy who'd somehow gotten over the wall? But how could anybody do that? Or, instead, was it one of the other men who'd simply had enough of this dog-watching and had blown his cork when this one had begun acting up? But which of the men would have the guts and strength?

Big Sol? He was the only one. Almost three hundred pounds of him, he was skilled at karate and, even without his training, could break down a door with his fist. He

looked like a Japanese Sumo wrestler. He was fearless, mainly because he was very stupid. Naturally no man called him stupid to his face. You had the feeling that, whatever weapons you carried, Sol could wade in and feed them to you. He was used by Frank only for discipline within the organization, because he was too conspicuous and clumsy to take to the outside. Nonetheless, only Big Sol would have the psycho-mixture and the ability to shut up one of these Dobermans with anything except a gun.

Larry released the dog's leg and stood up. He looked around him, keeping the hammer cocked on his .45. He walked back toward the house, taking a wide-sweeping route. As he did so, he kept his eyes peeled for dogs and men. Two of the Dobermans snapped at him with low growls before he saw one of the guys huddling over a window sill.

Marvin Glass smiled sickly at him.

"You're supposed to be walking the grounds," Larry said coldly.

"I've *been* walking the grounds. Nothing out there but dogs and rain."

"How about Big Sol? You see him out here just a bit ago?"

Marvin shook his head. "He's probably upstairs with the old man. You want me to check?"

"Uh-uh," Larry said, watching Marvin's eager smile fade. "I'll check it out myself. In the meantime, you get out there and walk the grounds."

Marvin grunted. "Man, here I am, on a dark sloshy night pounding a beat just like a cop!" He sloshed off.

Larry hit the porch and opened the front door. Crossing the terrazzo floor, his shoes squished into the deep-piled carpeting of the stairwell. As he went up he found that the water running from his raincoat and onto the pile gave

him a small measure of satisfaction. *Hope it ruins the damned thing*, he thought to himself.

Outside the library on the second floor, he was stopped by one of Frank's top aides.

"You're supposed to be outside, Larry."

"I've gotta see Frank. And Big Sol, too. Are they both in there?"

"Yeah. But what do you want with Big Sol?"

"Open it up and you can find out along with Frank and Sol."

The door swung open.

Frank Anthony jumped to his feet. "Larry—you're supposed to be—"

"Outside," Larry completed. "I just came from there. I wanted to ask you if Big Sol has been out of your sight recently."

The heavy man had been seated in a wing-backed chair that he barely fit into. He struggled to rise, going through a motion like a snake peeling off its unusable skin.

"I ain't been nowhere," his low voice grated.

Larry looked from him to Frank. "That right, Frank?"

"What's going on, Larry? You crazy or something? Sol ain't been nowhere."

"I wanted to hear it from you. If Sol has been *here*, then it had to be somebody else killed one of those dogs."

Frank Anthony's face went white. "Killed . . . one of the Dobermans?"

Larry nodded. "Broke his back. I think maybe we got visitors."

Frank was about to order him back outside, but Larry already had exited. As he trotted down the stairs, he could hear his boss shouting out orders from above. He distinctly heard the words *garlic* and *crucifix*.

Outside the rain was coming down still harder, but the

sight of the heavier drops did not irk Larry as much as another.

"Marvin! What are you doing? I told you to get out there on—"

His voice broke off. Marvin Glass acted as if he had not heard him. He stood there, a blank look in his eyes. On the porch at his feet, and in his hands, were several strands of garlic. Marvin had pulled them from the top and sides of the front door!

"Marvin! *Marvin!*"

"He cannot hear you," said a quiet voice to Larry's right.

The dogs began howling then.

Upstairs, an aide passed the telephone to Frank Anthony.

"You better take this, Frank. It's Albert. He's at Danny Trafalgar's place."

"The dogs," said the old man, his eyes wide with fear. "The dogs are howling. Why should the dogs be howling?"

"Frank. The telephone. Albert."

"Albert?" Frank appeared to be trying to remember just who that could be. "I don't want to talk to Albert or anybody. Do you hear the dogs?"

The aide put the telephone to his own ear. "Look, the boss is tied up right now. What's happening?" He listened, then: "A war? *Danny* put the word out? But we don't know nothing about no war. Put *Danny* on." There was a pause, then, "Frank! Albert says *Danny* called a war—*three* of them, he thinks. One of *Danny's* guys thought it was kind of strange, so he checked with Albert. So Albert tried to get *Danny* by phone and couldn't. He made a

couple more calls, then he went to Danny's place—and Danny's been hit! Somebody tore his throat out!"

The old man smiled absently. "Danny didn't believe me. He didn't. You young men these days think you know everything." The red had now all but disappeared from his lips, his eyes looked like white round ping-pong balls with black-pointed centers which stared off into nowhere. "You think you know it all. Danny thought so, and Danny's dead. But in the Old Country we knew some things, too."

"Frank—we got a war on. *Three* wars! Who ordered them?"

"*I did,*" Count Dracula said from the open doorway.

Across the room from him there were six men in all. Five had been seated. Four shot to their feet. Three of the rising men, plus the aide who had been standing in front of Frank Anthony's desk, filled their hands with guns. Big Sol did not carry one. There was a revolver in the top desk drawer, but Frank Anthony didn't move for it. Frank Anthony didn't move at all.

"Who the blazes are you?" the aide demanded of the cultured-looking man in black.

"Blazes," Dracula ran the word around his tongue. "Yes, that is an excellent idea. I shall follow your suggestion . . . afterward."

"I asked you a question, Mister!"

"In which case, you deserve an answer. I suggest you ask your leader, he who sits quietly behind the desk."

"They don't know anything," Frank Anthony whispered.

The men with the guns looked from their boss to the man in the doorway. Suddenly, one of them moved. Not one of the gunmen, but Big Sol.

Like a bull he charged, snorting as he did so, his huge

hands spread wide before him. He was only slightly shorter than his intended victim, but his arm length was abnormally long. Thus it came as a complete shock to him, as well as those who watched, when what looked to be a simple arm thrust by the black-caped man not only stopped him in his tracks but sent him back halfway across the room.

Big Sol stood as if stunned. His pig-eyes darted from the stranger to his own men and to his employer. The others in the room seemed to be looking at him with disbelief. Frank seemed not to be looking at anything at all. There was something in his face he could not read. It frightened Big Sol. It was something he'd never seen before. And the others—they were looking as if they thought he was stupid or something. No one ever had looked at him that way! They always treated him with respect—with fear. It was that man in black—it was *his* fault! He'd show him. He'd show them all!

With a bison-like roar, again he charged, his face contorted with a mixture of menace and hate. Again there was just one simple movement on the enemy's part, and Sol's beefy fist not only did not connect but sailed past its intended victim—as did his whole body, which ended in a crashing face-first collision with the glass-filled bar in the corner of the door.

Needles of pain shot through his face. He touched his jaw and cheek with his open palm and, inspecting his hand, saw that it was covered with bits of glass and blood. Again he looked at his boss and the other men. They seemed to avoid his eyes. He was now unworthy of them even *looking* at him. Straightening himself up to a fighting stance, he now once more focused on the man who stood where he had been when Sol had first rushed him.

He was *smiling*! Then he was speaking, not to Sol, but to the others:

"If, gentlemen, this hulk of hog-flesh is of any value to you whatsoever, I suggest you call him off. Otherwise. . ."

He let the word trail off and directed his attention to the big man in the corner. Sol could taste the blood that was filling his mouth. He knew he was going to have to take this man. Sure, the guy knew some of those fancy fighting tricks that Sol knew, too, but never had to use. Well, let's just see how dancing around would save the punk's neck now!

He stepped forward cautiously, trying to remember the moves of the fighting craft he had learned and mastered years ago. His eyes narrowed and the grin on his face accurately reflected his thoughts of what he would do when he got his hands on—

That's when it happened. The other man's moves were at most just four. One, he stepped forward and his two gloved hands grasped Sol, one hand to the side of his collar and the other under his groin. At the second move Sol felt himself being turned around and, at the third, his feet left the ground—he was being lifted like a newborn baby! But it was the fourth move that terrified Sol. Suddenly he was airborne, thrust from the stranger like a two-handed shot-put. He screamed as he saw the great window rushing upon him, then screamed again as the frame and glass shattered about him and he thudded into the wet but deadly hard ground below.

In the room upstairs, two of the guns spoke. Then there was a silence as fingers struggled with triggers. "*I can't fire the gun!*" one man cried.

Frank Anthony looked at the man with disinterest. "It don't make no difference . . . guns can't hurt him."

Count Dracula corrected him. "That's not entirely true, which is why I'm not allowing them to be fired. Not yet. I shall give my permission in a moment, when the proper targets are present. Ah! They come."

He turned from the desk and faced the door. All of the eyes in the room followed his. All eyes except his registered uncontrollable terror, even Frank Anthony was not immune to the spectre which presented itself at the entrance to the room. Or, it should be said, spectres which presented themselves. Plural.

The five Dobermans.

They arranged themselves in a straight shoulder-to-shoulder line before the door. Their bodies were taut, ready to spring. Even though their salivating jaws were open, they remained in position, as if awaiting the word from a trainer at an obedience school.

Dracula smiled with approval.

"They are impatient, my sleek friends. They have little sense of the dramatic, perhaps not knowing that they themselves are dramatic enough to satisfy any onlooker. You gentlemen would agree, I am sure. They do not enjoy being mastered, not even by myself. In this they are much like their distant cousins whom I found useful long ago. Allow them to slip their hold, and they viciously turn upon the hand which fed them. It is the nature of the beast that they prefer to feed themselves."

The Count pointed a finger at Frank Anthony. "This one you are not to harm, my children. As for the others, you may fight among yourselves as to which you take." He paused, then crossed the room to stand before the men. "Ah, yes. I cannot allow you to remain frozen like you are now. It simply would not be sporting of me, would it? Loosing these creatures upon defenseless men—it would be much like the way you yourself kill, would it

not? Know, then, that I am not as inhumane as you are. You shall be able to fire those weapons of yours when I give the word of attack."

Again he paused, as if trying to remember a small detail of a larger plan.

"Of course. The lights. We shall not need those, will we, my little friends?"

There were three lights on in the room, three lamps. One over the bar, another by a lounge chair, and the third on the top of Frank Anthony's desk. When the other two were off, the Count grasped the chain of the desk lamp. Checking that all was as it should be, he pulled the chain without a word.

Immediately there were volleys of shots answered by a chorus of low-pitched growls and the soft sounds of padded feet striding across the deep-piled carpet. Furniture toppled, glass broke. Now there came screams which ended in throat-slashed gurgles. More shots but irregular and fewer, then more cries of death. Then silence.

And light.

The five dogs sat obediently on their haunches, forming a semi-circle around the front of the desk. Behind them were Frank Anthony's men lying in a room that was a shambles.

"I knew. . . ." Frank Anthony said, his eyes focused on the top of his desk, not willing to look at the dogs nor at the being which hovered over him. "When the howling began . . . I knew you were coming. . . ."

"And now, old man? Now that I am here?"

Frank Anthony lifted his eyes and scanned the room. "They—they didn't believe me. I told them. Give him what he wants, I told them." His eyes tried to look into Dracula's but they turned away. "What do I have of yours?"

"Nothing. Not now. I have what I sought from your puny organization."

"Then why have you come?"

"As an associate of mine put it, there was one last little chore that must be accomplished. That chore, or part of it, still remains."

Suddenly Frank Anthony seemed to come to life. "*Me?* You would kill *me*? *No!* I defy you, vampire. I have here something you can't—"

But the hand he placed inside his smoking jacket stayed where it was. Try as he would, he could not take his hand from the pocket. And his fingers *had* it—the *crucifix!*

"An effective weapon against such as I," Dracula said. "The sign of the cross is older than you might appreciate, old man. But the power of it works only in the open. It cannot affect me from its present place of concealment." He bent his face closer to the cringing old man.

"*No!* I have done nothing to you—not *me!* I *believed* in you! The others—they didn't—but I *believed*—"

"Know then, old man, that your beliefs were well-founded. Perhaps you might find comfort in that. How many of you petty humans can say the same—at their appointed time of death?"

CHAPTER 14

Outside the Westhampton manor, the rain had increased its ferocity, sheets of it now falling in thick rivers which the heightened wind drove inland from the sea in a succession of battering forces that rocked the old three-story structure. To the howling winds rushing through the trees surrounding the house was added the pounding of the surf as it crashed with cannon clarity against the dunes that were the only barrier between the sea and the vulnerable land which they protected. The old bones of the manor creaked noisily under the strain of its resistance to the elements. In the basement laboratory the cracklings and crashes, both external and internal, of man-made shelter and nature-fashioned storm, reverberated from the walls as if the stones formed a concentrated sound chamber.

The flickering light was evidence that a power substation or its distribution lines fought to maintain their function; Ktara watched grimly from a reclining chair as, across the room at the laboratory benches, the two men worked. They had begun immediately after the sta-

tion wagon had screamed to a halt before the house and Cam had fought the walls of rain to haul the wooden crate into the brightly lit hallway. Cam literally had torn the slats from the side of the crate, the professor urging him to be more careful, warning him that the equipment inside was delicate.

"If something should be malfunctioning now—" he began, then stopped as he noticed the woman was present.

Satisfied that what they needed appeared to be in working order, they took the elevator down to the basement, where equipment already on hand had been spread out on a table earlier in anticipation of this moment. Their hands moved deftly, as if the two had rehearsed every move in advance, the professor now and then issuing a one-word instruction and Cam reacting with fingers and tools only, no word or expression necessary.

It was a simple-looking structure they were building, but each enclosed part was a complexity unto itself. There were in all nine such parts, two of which had existed as they were now prior to Harmon's placing his order. Five more had been scaled down or changed in minor ways from existing pieces, and two had been made to order from Harmon's original designs. Six of the parts were in place when the crash came from above. It was the front door, judging by the sound and its location. Then the second sound came.

Barking.

Harmon's eyes shot upward. "The dogs! He's brought them from—"

But Cam already was on his feet and across the room. Reaching behind a row of bottles he brought out an implement he had stashed there—just in case. The .357 Smith & Wesson felt good in his hand. Now if he could make it to the stairs in time—

The door at the top of the landing opened just as Cam reached the first step. He had no doubt about who had opened the door, and there was no doubt as to the identity of the thing that hurtled downward, its four feet leaving the stone steps a good fifteen feet from Cam.

This time it was not the dog that barked. It was the Magnum. The Doberman was dead on arrival but its plummeting mass, thudding into Cam's chest, drove both man and beast backward and crashing to the floor. Before Cam could rise, a second set of fangs had been launched from the stairs. As the second dog's trajectory arced downward, so did Cam's gun, both arches meeting as gun barrel cracked into the beast's nose bone. With a howl of pain, the animal leaped from Cam and skidded across the basement floor as a slug from the revolver tore its skull to fragments.

The third Doberman got it a quarter of the way down the stairs. Cocking the hammer back for his next shot, Cam extended his pistol up the stairwell.

The stairwell was empty.

Suddenly he realized the basement room was not.

He whirled with his pistol. As he'd suspected, while he had been occupied with one of the two entrances to the laboratory, the other had been used. Before the elevator door stood two more Dobermans, each of them on one side of a narrow-eyed Count Dracula.

"Stay right where you are, Mr. Sanchez. That gun you may as well drop to the floor. You will be dead before you get off your second shot—and you are well aware that your first bullet will be no more than an inconvenience to me."

Cam shot a look at Harmon. The professor nodded. The gun clanked to the stone.

The Count's lips curled into a smile. "Thank you.

Professor Harmon, I caution you to stay where you are as well." His eyes flashed to Ktara. "And you, my lovely. You remain also where you are."

Ktara did not change expressions. Her face reflected little interest in what was happening, as if she were viewing a stage play she had seen before.

Oddly, Harmon on his part did not appear disturbed either. "You've accomplished your work?"

The Count laughed. "All completed, Professor Harmon. My pledged word has been fulfilled to the letter." He pointed a mocking finger at the device which lay on the table almost assembled. "I see all was well within your prized package. But I fear that you worked too slowly, Professor. Much too slowly."

Harmon smiled casually. "I'm afraid I don't quite follow you."

"Then let me make myself more clear. During those hours in which you, by your graciousness, have allowed me to remain awake, I have noticed something. Two things, actually. One, which no one of any intelligence could miss, was your eagerness to get your hands on a certain packing crate. An eagerness which was too intense merely to reflect the desire of a man to have a possession at hand. Such a desire would be understandable, of course, in this materialistic world in which you live, but your desire was a consuming passion—as if the *time* factor were all-important."

"The second thing you noticed?"

"Yes. Those little sound signals I have within me. The ones issuing from that ingenious little device you implanted. Unless I misjudge my own senses, they have been weakening—by slight degrees, yes, but in all, quite dramatically. Right at this moment they are very, very weak. I have a theory—rather a conclusion—from putting

my two observations together. Would you care to hear it?"

Harmon's answer was not verbal. Whirling in his wheel-chair so that he was full-face with the vampire, he closed his eyes tightly and concentrated. There had to be enough power left—*there must be!*

The vision of the tiny lever. The force of the mind pin-pointed to form a finger touching the lever . . . touch . . . there! Now the pressure, steadily building strength. . . .

"There is a problem, Professor, associated with the use of mental power. It can be countered by the mind which controls greater power. Mine is such a mind. Especially is it so now that I have been fully fed!"

Pressure . . . building . . . but the lever does not yield! It must yield!

"Mine also is such a mind, Master." Ktara's words floated across the room and into an unused portion of Harmon's brain.

Again Dracula laughed. *A small forward move on the lever, but not enough . . . and now moving back.*

"That is true, my darling. But you—with all your seeress powers—have not the strength to sway my will. Not even should I decide to boil your brain would—"

Again the lever moves . . . cannot allow myself to be distracted . . . let him be the distracted one! But, no . . . ground gained is now again lost. . . .

"You would not do away with me, Master. Who would remain to supply you with your needs when the stake once more is driven into your soul?"

"I am immortal!"

There! Almost all the way to—damn it! The pressure . . . I can't stand it too much longer. . . .

"I too, am immortal, Master. But perhaps someday I

might wish to end my days. I feel your mind now, Master. You wish to slay someone. It cannot be this man Harmon—either through your dogs or mind—else you too will die. It cannot be myself, else your mind-force will be distracted and Harmon will have his way with you. For the same reason, it cannot be this man Sanchez who even now wonders how he might enter the fray to save his old friend. If he, like I, could hear what sounds issue from within your head, Master—”

The hot white beam . . . now, at its greatest intensity . . . all . . . all!

“No, Harmon, not yet! Do you think I cannot destroy your mind and yet leave you living? Watch, then, as I—”

“*As you lose your battle!*” Cam shouted. “Hear me, Count, hear my voice in your head—and hear *this!*”

Too late Dracula realized what Cam was about to do. Too late he gave the signals for the dogs to attack, and too late did they charge forward.

It was a simple act, a mere scratching of a thumbnail over the grid of the communicator that had been in Cam’s pocket. But it was enough. As the tiny receiver behind Dracula’s ear picked up the message—

The vampire screamed. The dogs stopped in their tracks.

All! ALL!

Then the vampire screamed again. And Cam’s pistol barked twice. Count Dracula lying on the stone floor, the two Dobermans dead at his side. The Professor shuddered. For a while no one spoke. When someone did, it was Harmon.

“Ktara—”

“There is no need to thank me. You were fortunate that the power stored up within you was barely enough.

Before the coming day is past, your recharger will be complete, and that one difficulty at least will be overcome."

Harmon nodded. "You have not answered my question."

The woman smiled. "You mean *why*. Why I said what I did to your man."

"Why you helped us, yes."

"I did not *help* you, Professor Harmon. I could have joined my mind with yours and pushed that lever with you, but I did not. I am a spirit bound to that of my Master. I cannot fight against him."

Harmon nodded. "A spirit bound to your Master's. ~~But~~ one with a will of its own."

Ktara stood and walked to the fallen vampire. "I will care for him." Then, looking straight at Harmon, she said, "You seek an explanation. Let it be this. My spirit is, as you say, one with a will of its own. When it is possible, I do as it pleases me. Perhaps tonight it pleased me to allow you to live. Do not thank me for my whim, Professor Harmon. Tomorrow night or some night in the future, something other than this may please me."

She turned from him, only to return her eyes to his. "Then, too, I must admit to having an amount of curiosity about what you will do—now that you have a tamed Count Dracula, as you call him, at your service?"

"Oh?" Harmon said. "And is it a *tamed* Count Dracula that I have at my service?"

The three of them looked at the contorted face of the fallen vampire. Suddenly Ktara laughed sharply, a laugh that rose above the sounds of the storm still raging outside.

"No. Of course not."

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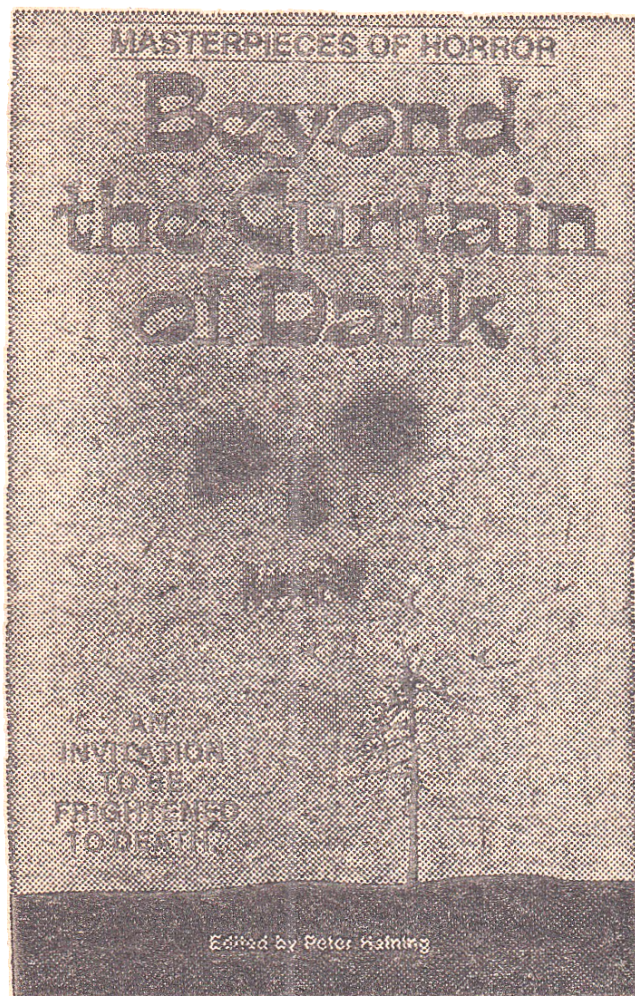
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His features were rigid—yet there was life in them. You could almost hear his heart beat. There was no sign of decomposition. He seemed so real and so horrifying that we were almost afraid to touch him. His clothes were impeccable, very formal, and the flower in his buttonhole seemed fresh. Signaling Cam to give me my bag, I set to work: I implanted a device—the size of a small pillbox—just below Dracula's right floating rib and carefully sutured the opening.

I told Cam to pull the stake out slowly, not all the way out but almost, and to be prepared to force it back again if I cried out. Cam pulled slowly upwards; and as the stake was withdrawn, the wound healed right before our eyes! I looked at the area of the implant and the stitches appeared as though they had been stitched through uncut flesh.

And so Professor Damien Harmon and his assistant, Cameron Sanchez, introduce the magic of modern technology into the vampire heart of the dreaded Count Dracula. What evil reincarnation have they wrought? What wicked deeds will this demon from the darkest depths of horror perpetrate now? Or is Dracula to become something more hideous than a monstrous shadow of his legendary past? Come, open the coffin with us!